LABOUR BRIEFING

40p FORTNIGHTLY

NO.75 JAN 11-25 1989

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•The Charter 88 debate
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• *and lots more!*

40p

AFTER REAGAN'S PARTING SHOT, MAKE 1989...

THE YEAR OF UNILATERALISM!

The latest act of US military aggression against Libya appears to be all Reagan could come up with in response to Gorbachev's historic UN announcement of unilateral Soviet military cutbacks.

Reagan's parting shot has shown once again that disarmament and peace cannot be achieved by leaving superpowers to the privacy of the negotiating table.

What a time for Neil Kinnock to unleash an attack on Labour's commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament!

Labour Briefing Editorial Board

According to Kinnock and friends, 1989 should be the year when Labour dumps its "outmoded" defence policy in favour of something "modern", something like:

•increases in conventional weaponry, at a time when the putative Soviet enemy is reducing its own armoury;

•retention of the fictitious "British nuclear deterrent", at a time when both superpowers are cutting back their nuclear arsenals;

•continued British hospitality for US weaponry of all types, at a time when US policies and US leadership are becoming increasingly unpopular in Britain;

•a renewed commitment to the "Atlanticist" doctrine tying Britain to NATO and to US foreign policy aims, at a time when a wider European and international vision is beginning to gain a tenuous foothold.

Now, more than ever, the time is right for Labour to mount a major campaign for unilateral nuclear disarmament.

The Soviet announcement at the UN must be unique in world history. Has there ever been another example of a major world military power voluntarily making substantial unilateral reductions in its armed forces?

Gorbachev's bold gambit heartened millions across the globe. It also put paid to the "we can't get rid of ours till they get rid of theirs" multilateralist logic.

This logic, which rests on the assumption that the Soviet Union is a threat, leads not to general disarmament by gradual stages, but to an unbreakable cycle of "militarty preparedness", endless innovations in weapons technology, and a perpetuation of Cold War.

Economic crisis, a key factor in pushing Gorbachev into his unilateral declaration, will have different consequences in the US, where the Bush administration, elected without anything like Reagan's infamous mandate, faces an uncertain future.

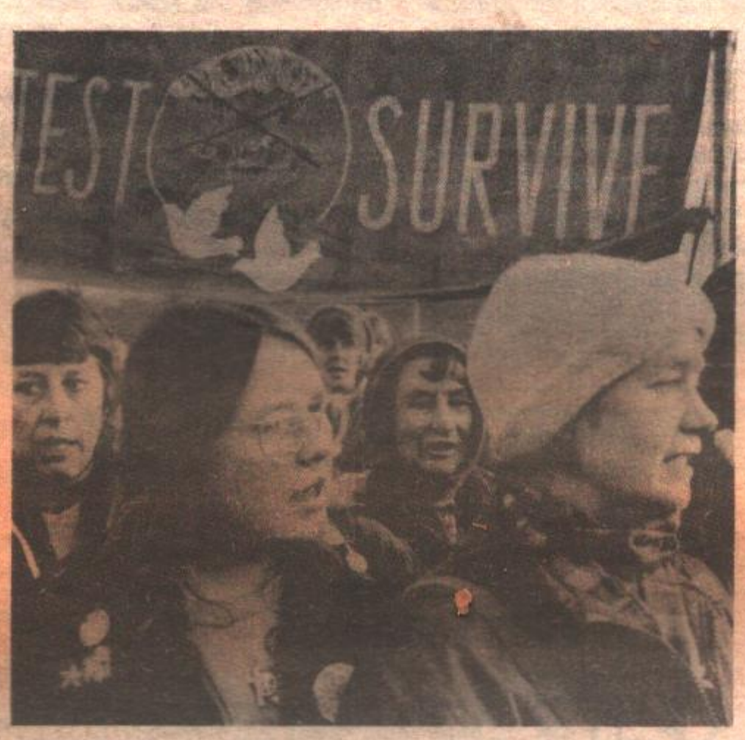
In the Soviet Union "peace" and "disarmament" are part of the official ideology; in the US, the official ideology remains mired in the Cold War. Nonetheless, the huge federal deficit will make the mind-bogglingly vast military budget less and less politically defensible.

This year's elections for the European Parliament offer Labour a big chance. Were we to turn the Euro-elections into a referendum on nuclear weapons, on NATO policy, on Thatcher's chauvinist militarism, we could make substantial gains, and set the stage for a successful General Election onslaught. This would be a genuinely "modern" and "popular" approach, but our leadership is set against it.

Our first task must be to secure a reaffirmation of unilateralism at the 1989 Labour Party Conference.

This requires more than just circulating useful model resolutions and hoping someone somewhere passes them. It requires a full-scale campaigning united front, reaching deep into the CLPs and trade unions, and reinvigorating the peace movement. In this way, we can mobilise the unilateralist majority which does undoubtedly exist within the labour movement.

The union block vote will, of course, prove decisive at the 1989 Conference. But even more important, in the long run, only a support for unilateralism deep-rooted in the



working class (and not dependent on the whims of union bureaucrats) can win and hold Labour to unilateralism.

Only this support can give the Labour Party the social muscle it will need to carry out unilateral nuclear disarmament when it forms a government.

The mass campaigns of the early 80s need to be renewed and the peace movement reinvigorated. CND and other peace groups need to swing into action. We have to take public steps to move the question of nuclear weapons back up the political agenda and place it firmly in the forefront of popular consciousness.

The struggle against nuclear weapons is a key part of the struggle against imperialism world-wide and against our own ruling class. It also remains, as it has done since the onset of the Cold War, inseparable from the general fortunes of the left in the Labour Party and trade unions.

Any victories on this issue, including the limited but essential one of tying the British Labour Party to unilateralism, weaken our enemies at home and abroad, and strengthen the working class and oppressed people everywhere.

Let's make 1989 the year of unilateralism!

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Letters

WRITEBACK!

We welcome your letters!

Disagree with something? — write in.
Agree with something? — Write in.
Want to raise a new idea? — Write in.

Let's hear your views!

Write to: Writeback, Labour Briefing, 39 Talia House, Manchester Road, London E14 9HB.
Please send letters for the next issue to arrive by Wednesday, January 18th if possible.
Letters over 300 words may be cut for reasons of space.

Will the real Stalinists please stand up?

Dear *Briefing*,

As an active member of the Labour Party and the Anti-Apartheid Movement, I would like to ask you to comply with existing Labour Party policy by allowing me a right of reply to Mike Phipps' article (*Briefing* no. 74) on the Anti-Apartheid Movement Annual General Meeting.

Whilst not wishing to address the more absurd claims of Comrade Mike, I do wish to point out that the A-AM did discuss the international campaign to release Moses Mayekiso.

However, we also discussed the campaign on behalf of other trade unionists facing repression in South Africa and Namibia such as William Ntombela and Tjeluvuyo Mgedezi, who are on death row, and trade union veterans Harry Gwala (now released) and Oscar Mpetha.

Also, Mike questioned the democracy at the most representative AGM ever held by the A-AM. His own estimate of 40 people supporting the "oppositionist" viewpoint highlighted that 90% of the delegates supported the Executive Committee's positions.

This obviously troubles Mike as he resorts to denigrating the A-AM. Perhaps he prefers a form of democracy where 40 delegates can dictate the Movement's policy to 360 delegates.

In that case, I would ask that the real Stalinists please stand up.

Yours Sincerely,
Colin Adkins,
Harlesden, London

Skimming over a real conflict

Dear *Briefing*,

Brian Statham's analysis of the situation within NALGO (Briefing, no. 73) was of considerable interest.

However, I feel that in his analysis he rather skimmed over a central problem.

When he writes, "the virtual autonomy of big city branches has often led the left to retreat into local bastions paying scant attention to organisation at District and National level," I recognise, to some extent, a description and criticism of the Birmingham Branch.

However, I applaud even more his later statement that "many local members will fight back — on cuts, redundancies and on questions like sexual harassment."

The fact is that in practical as well as theoretical terms the objectives of encouraging the maximum amount of activity among members locally and of organisation regionally/nationally do conflict.

It is necessary to prioritise and, personally, I believe that it is absolutely correct to prioritise local organisation and local activity even if this leads to accusations of retreating into bastions.

I am quite sure that this issue is not one which can be fudged by ignoring it.

Yours fraternally,
Nick Hay,
Secretary,
Birmingham NALGO

Why glamorise Thatcherism?

Dear *Briefing*,

What is *Briefing* coming to, printing an article giving praise, only slightly qualified, to one of the more trivial "soaps" on TV?

Surely this was written tongue in cheek?

It would take a far better pen than mine to offer a deeper analysis of "soaps" in general, and it needs to be done in the pages of *Briefing*, but I must comment on the article.

Neighbours is watched as temporary escapism from the daily humdrum of many lives; also as pure relaxation, which is encouraged by its totally undemanding character.

The effects of constant exposure to the portrayal of characters of little depth, obsessed with their own individual problems, can only be negative.

People are effectively stopped from talking to each other in leisure moments; after the show, personal discussion focuses on the current trivialities of the serial.

Even more serious are the deeper implications. The characters are established as role models, suggesting that how they behave and conduct their lives is desirable, or at least acceptable as the norm, and this is impressed on viewers day after day.

It all has a *subliminal* effect. They represent a levelling down of the quality and scope of human behaviour, while culture should be about stimulating and levelling upwards.

"Soaps" by their very nature (originally to achieve and maintain mass audiences on behalf of soap manufacturers in the USA who subsidised them), concentrate on the presentation of individual problems, diverting viewers from collective problems such as racism, poverty, homelessness and the decline of the welfare state; these issues being firmly excluded from the scripts of *Neighbours*, though not necessarily from all "soaps".

By concentrating the settings in family situations, with the individual characters doing the best they can for themselves and their families, the series unobtrusively glamorises the essence of the Thatcher philosophy, if not the whole morality of the bourgeois way of life.

William West maintains that *Neighbours* is cultural. Linda Clarke, reviewing a biography of John Reed, writes that the book left her "inspired, uplifted and breathless."

Any serious work of literature or art should be expected to leave a person with at least some of those feelings; they hardly describe the effect of watching *Neighbours*.

No, without any equivocation, this TV series is an attack on working class culture, and an attack on the working class. It must be seen as such.

Frank Neal
Haringey Labour Briefing

Out of the straitjackets!

Dear *Briefing*,

The fact that *Briefing* has an article, albeit brief, on "*Fantastic Neighbours*" illustrates only too clearly how *Neighbours* has become part of life for many people of all political views in this country, from the very young to the elderly.

Instead of inflating *Neighbours* to the cultural level of Shakespeare, William West would be better occupied by studying in more depth what is lacking in our society.

What is it that leads people to need to escape into such seductive but irrelevant drivel, which lacks, as William West acknowledges, any serious comment on current issues?

Is life so depressing and lacking in hope?

Programmes such as *Telethon* and *Children in Need* show that individuals can and do respond, both emotionally and materially, to needs they can identify with.

TV is a powerful medium reaching the majority of homes. Why are we not trying to use this forum more?

Not focusing on political polemics, anathema to most of us ordinary folk, but demonstrating the harsh realities facing so many people today.

Are we so cushioned, so divorced from reality that we do not need more of this information?

Comrades, get out of your intellectual straitjackets and try to convey your emotions in a more constructive way. Use your energies to collate information, and your intellectual abilities to communicate more meaningfully with ordinary people.

Yours sincerely,
Margaret Neal
Haringey, N. London
(Not a regular *Briefing* reader)

Periscope

Send snippets and info to Greg Bassett, Periscope Column, Labour Briefing, PO Box 457, London SW2 5UZ

Exposed! Top hack's useless "exclusive"

By a special correspondent

Well-paid *Sun* political editor **Trevor Kavanagh** emerged last month as the know-nothing author of a luridly-headlined article designed to whip up Britain's 500,000 nurses.

Kavanagh, a self-styled journalist, chose a witch-hunting piece as the way to counter nurses' rising militancy over pay regrading.

His article (*Sun*, December 6th) claimed that *Briefing* supporter **John Lister** (an employee of watchdog body London Health Emergency) was "a key figure in a battle to turn moderate line militants", as part of "a campaign to cripple hospitals".

The real culprit of course is Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke, whose cash limits and inflammatory statements have closed more beds and provoked more walk-outs than Lister has had hot dinners.

A *Briefing* probe has revealed that Kavanagh's "exclusive" (penned from anti-union Fortress Wapping):

- LIFTED a central allegation — concerning an Austin Rover strike — from an equally false 1983 *Daily Express* front page;
- FAILED to check even the correct address of the office from which alleged "Red Mole" Lister works;
- QUOTED three year-old headlines relating to long-closed hospitals in a desperate bid to link Lister to current nurses' militancy;
- INVENTED links between Lister and Ken Livingstone;
- FABRICATED claims that Lister had published "how to strike guides" and "tips on keeping industrial disputes going even when strikers want to return to work"(!);
- FAILED to produce a shred of evidence to link Lister to action by any group of nurses anywhere in the country;
- PRODUCED an article so limp that not a single other tabloid took up the story.

Kavanagh's extremist paper, masterminded by self-proclaimed millionaire Rupert Murdoch (the shadowy figure behind major strikes and massive job losses in Fleet Street), is paid for by taxpayers across the country, among whom are ratepayers in Labour-run London Boroughs of Camden, Islington and Hounslow.

One of them, Mr Syd Scrunge, last night lent his voice to the growing demands for the gravy train to be halted and Kavanagh and his fellow extremists kicked off:

"I never read that stuff, anyway," he told *Briefing* in an exclusive interview.


EXPOSED! THE RED MOLE BEHIND NURSES' STRIKE

Marxist stirs up pickets

By TREVOR KAVANAGH Political Editor

DEDICATED Marxist John Lister emerged last night as the mastermind behind a campaign to cripple hospitals.

Lister, a self-proclaimed revolutionary, is the key figure in a [illegible] moderate nurses [illegible]

Exclusive

League, spells out his extremist political message in his own national newspaper Health Emergency.

It feeds on the grievances of trainee nurses and low-paid hospital workers with lurid headlines like "Union Militants Victimised" and "Nenaden Hospital Occupied".

[illegible] published how-to-strike

The Greening of Thatcher

Thatcher's sudden conversion to environmentalism surprised many and dismayed some, particularly the Minister for the Environment, Nicholas Ridley.

Briefing is pleased to be able to clear up the mystery.

A week after the Tory Party Conference, tucked away in the financial pages of an up-market paper, there appeared the annual report of a company called Attwood, Drinkwater Sabey (you may have seen their lorries about).

It is a multinational firm engaged in the waste disposal and landfill sites business in the UK and the US.

Twenty-eight per cent of its shares (a controlling interest) are held by Hawleys, another and bigger multinational which also owns Mediclean, a company infamous for its activities in NHS contract cleaning.

Attwoods, according to its financial report, has waxed amazingly fat and profitable recently from its activities in cleaning up polluted beaches in the US. There is money to be made form environmentalism, it seems!

And guess who is Deputy Chairman of Attwoods? None other than Dennis "I don't mind if I do" Thatcher. Q.E.D?

CONTACT BRIEFING

We bring you *Briefing* this week from our bivouac in central London; a broomcupboard where we sit pasting up on tea chests full of our belongings. Soon, we hope, we shall leave base camp, for the assault on the summit — a new, permanent deluxe HQ.

For the moment, please send articles and money to 39 Talia House, Manchester Road, London E14 9HB.

The copydate for articles for the next paper is Jan. 17th (out Jan. 24th); the following one is Jan. 31st (out Feb. 7th).

Now's the time to go round and collect paper money after slackening off the in the festive break!

Don't forget, we've launched a £1,000 fund to help us with moving costs. We've had removal expenses, and we'll need hard cash to equip our new office. So start planning your fund-raising events now.

Don't forget our 500 Club; the winner of which will be announced in this space each issue from now on. Write to the above address for details of how to join. This week's winner is: number 478 — longstanding supporter Tessa van Gelderen of Brent.

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Campaign 89: some priorities

At long last, the Campaign Group of MPs has taken steps to organise the Labour left in the constituencies and trade unions.

Under the title of the Campaign for Socialism — or Campaign 89 — a regional and national network is being assembled. Inevitably, the process is uneven, difficult, and at times fractious.

Briefing hopes the Campaign for Socialism meeting on January 14th will take steps to deal with a number of pressing issues.

First, we need to move towards a democratic national structure through which the left rank and file can take decisions about policy, NEC slates, leadership contests, etc.

Initially, this requires strengthening and broadening the regional bodies (or, in some cases, starting them up from scratch). It also requires publicity, so that Party members become aware (as they are not at the moment) that the Campaign for Socialism exists.

Second, we need to mount a counter-offensive on Labour Party democracy. This mantle has been cynically hi-jacked by Kinnock, the LCC, and other devotees of so-called "one member, one vote".

But our counter-offensive must not be purely negative: we must meet Kinnock's attacks with positive proposals.

Along with the essential campaigns to enfranchise women and black people, we need to stake out new rights and new powers for the CLP and trade union rank and file based on a participatory and collective definition of democracy.

Third, we need to link up with the many struggles being waged outside the Party. The collapse of Party membership and morale is the responsibility of the right, but is damaging to the left.

We can only rebuild our base inside the Party by drawing on the strength of workers and oppressed people in struggle outside the Party — around the NHS, the Housing Act, the Poll Tax, abortion rights, racism, Ireland, etc.

Many left Party members are already concentrating their energies on such campaigns, if only because at the moment they appear to offer more scope for constructive socialist activity than Party meetings.

We have to harness this activity and make sure it has a home in the Labour left. In particular, it is vital that the Campaign Group MPs and the Campaign for Socialism openly endorse and help to organise resistance to the Poll Tax. After all, Govan has lessons for the left as well as the right.

Finally, there will be a fight this year to defend unilateralism. This will be a key test of the balance of forces in the Party.

The left as a whole must work together to mobilise massive support for unilateralism across the labour movement. If we succeed here, we will have thrown a giant spanner in Kinnock's works.

Warning: Capitalism Kills

It's no coincidence that accidents and disasters have proliferated in recent months.

The press treats Zeebrugge, Kings Cross, Alpha Piper, and Clapham Junction as one-off "acts of god". They are in fact the sad occasions when there wasn't a "lucky escape".

P&O's annual report shows an increase in near misses; while a second "Alpha Piper" style explosion was only just averted early this year. Reported fires on the London Underground run to about one a day. Rail unions had warned for months that BR cuts would lead to a Clapham-style crash.

Hundreds of other incidents and statistics, such as the appalling increase in building site deaths to 157 in 1988, go largely unreported, part of an attempt to play down the dangers the travelling public and the workforce run each day.

Thatcher's orthodox capitalist answer to the economic crisis is an assault on trade unions, wages and conditions; human sacrifices to the god of the market in a relentless drive for maximum profit.

And the labour movement "new realists" let her get away with it.

Socialism, that supposedly out of date, utopian philosophy, is about the organisation of society by the whole of the working class. A socialist society, liberated from the grip of profit, can plan the economy to put people first, at work and as consumers of services.

The requirements of capital and the protection of human life are in profound conflict. Those who defend capital must answer for the sacrifices they are exacting.

Economic Notebook



A Guide to Cityspeak

Whenever you hear on the radio or read in a newspaper that the share price of conglomerate Bloggs & Co "rose ahead of results due next week," you can be sure that a bit of insider dealing has been going on.

By FRANK SCOTT

The financiers are speculating on the basis of their inside knowledge of the firm's better-than-forecast profits or whatever.

The same usually goes for phrases like "strong bid rumours."

While no guidelines can be infallible, decoding Cityspeak is a useful skill. "Sentiment remained depressed" means that the City's in a bad mood (poor them).

"Continuing its spectacular progress..." usually means no one's quite sure why the share price is going up, or if they do, they're expecting a crash.

"Following a cautious statement" means that the company's financial results are going to be terrible.

A company's share price "falls in sympathy" because of a knee-jerk reaction to some other firm's problems, which just happens to be in the same industrial or commercial sector.

When a share has "softened (hardened) a penny (a point)" the commentators don't have anything to say, but have to fill the space or time.

"Rose ahead of an analysts' meeting" refers to a leak of good news, so the City analysts' meeting is superfluous, apart from a nice lunch or dinner.

"Favourable comment" means that another newspaper reporter gave a firm a nice write-up, in exchange for something or other.

Terms like "lack of support" or "sentiment was depressed" simply mean that a share price has drifted down and no one really knows why.

"Vague bid rumours" refer to one or more speculators' efforts to inject a bit of pep into a share price so that they can sell their shares at a profit.

"Profit-taking following the results" is profit or dividend figures much as expected (nothing more of interest to say).

A share price that "rose ahead of results due tomorrow (next week)" is either insiders doing their dealing or speculators bidding up the price so that they can take a nice profit before the firm's annual results come out.

If the price "fell ahead of results due tomorrow (next week)", someone's probably got some nasty inside information, but isn't telling everyone.

There's lots of other Cityspeak, like "soggy conditions" or "flagging interest", but they all refer in one way or another to the basic themes of the financial markets.

Some complicated share or financial deals merit something a little more explicit, and that's usually a bit more understandable. But most of the financial comment runs along the same old tracks.

If the firm you work for is mentioned, try to remember what's been said. The fall-out could affect your job!

Britain's much-vaunted increase in company profits has not led to an equivalent increase in industrial investment.

Instead, it seems British capitalists still prefer the more comfortable (capitalist) climate in the US, despite the "Thatcher miracle" and the palpable instability of the US economy.

Britain has become far and away the biggest foreign investor in the US. In 1987 it spent the equivalent of 4.69% of its Gross Domestic Product on acquiring US companies.

The Stock Market crash does not appear to have dampened the enthusiasm of our boys and girls in the City for the spoils of US capitalism. In the first six months of 1988 the British spent £7,458 million on 196 separate acquisitions.

Among the British companies colonising the former colonies are: Tate & Lyle, Maxwell Communications, Saatchi & Saatchi, and BAT.

In the year ending in June 1988, the total value of British transatlantic deals using new equity capital equalled 48.2% of the total new equity — i.e. capital investment via shares — raised on the London Stock Market.

At this rate, in only a few years British capital will own more corporate assets in the US than in Britain itself.

Campaign!

EVENTS DIARY

JANUARY.

Sat. 14th. **Irish Republican POW Campaign.** Women's Planning Meeting to organise International Women's Day Action. All women welcome. 1pm, Sparkhill Social and Multi-cultural Centre, Sparkhill Library, Stratford Road, Birmingham 11.

Tues. 17th. **Huddersfield Labour Briefing.** Public Meeting: *Women and Socialism*. Speaker: Sue Owen, *Leeds Labour Briefing*. 7.30pm, Huddersfield Town Hall.

Sat 21st. **Anti-Fascist Action** Picket: Stop the sale of Nazi propaganda in Carnaby Street. 12 noon. Merc M, Ganton Street, W1.

Sat. 21st. **Cable Street Beat:** *The Upstarts* & *The Blaggers*. The last Upstart gig was smashed up by NF breakaway "The White Noise Club". The Upstarts will not be stopped again. £3; £2 (concs.). 8pm, "Sir George Robey", 240 Seven Sisters Road, London N4. Finsbury Park tube.

FEBRUARY

Sat. 4th. **Labour Movement Conference:** *The Alternative to the Policy Review*. 10.30am: Registration. 11-12.30pm: Key issues in the Policy Review. Plenary chaired by Harry Cohen MP, Speakers: Jeremy Corbyn MP, Unmesh Desai, Ken Livingstone MP, Ann Pettifor. 1.30-3pm: Workshops, including Women & Labour, Defending Unilateral Nuclear Disarmament, Labour's Economic Policy, Why Labour Needs Black Sections, Defending Party Democracy, "Time To Go" (British Withdrawal from Ireland). 3-4.30pm: Building a Modern Labour Party. Speakers: Diane Abbott MP, John McDonnell, Mildred Gordon MP. Sponsorship sought. 10.30am-4.30pm, Queen Mary College Students Union, Bancroft Road, London E1. Tube: Mile End. Bus: 277, 106, 25. Registration £2 (waged), (unwaged). Contact East London Policy Review Conference, c/o 96a Stoke Newington High Street, London N16. Access: difficult; help provided.

Tues. 7th. **Irish in Britain Representation Group, Hackney Direct Labour Organisation, Construction Safety Campaign.** Public Meeting: *End Building Sites Carnage*. Irish construction workers especially welcome. IBRG, CSC, DLO members available from 6.30pm for discussion over tea, light refreshments. Speakers, display boards, videos. Meeting 7.30-9.30pm, Hackney Town Hall, Mare St., London E8.

Sat. 18th. **South East London Policy Review Conference.** 10.00am. Registration. 10.30am: *Policies for the 90s*, plenary with Ken Livingstone MP, Bernie Grant MP, Carol Hall, SOGAT. 11.30-1.00pm: Workshops, including Disarmament, The Economy, Women & Society, Black Rights & Black Sections, Trade Union & Job Rights, The Environment, Party Democracy, Ireland: Time To Go. 3.30-4.30pm: *What Kind of Party?*, plenary with Jon Lansman, Diane Abbott MP. 10.00am-5pm, Thames Polytechnic Students Union, Thomas St, London SE18. Creche provided. Disabled access difficult, but help provided.

MARCH

Weds. 4th. **Miners' Strike, 5th Anniversary Event.** Supported by Manchester City Council. Morning: three major workshops on privatisation, victimisation, women in struggle. Afternoon: Rally in the Great Hall. Evening: Top class entertainment hosted by Mike Elliot (of Albert Hall Heroes Concert fame). Speakers include: Arthur Scargill, Peter Heathfield, Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner. Manchester Town Hall.

Sat. 14th. **Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign.** Second anniversary of the Tottenham three convictions. March through Wood Green, Tottenham, to rally on the Farm. Quash the Convictions!

Highbury Quadrant School crisis

ILEA sides with racists

On December 8th, the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) announced that eight teachers at Highbury Quadrant School in Islington were to be redeployed.

They were told that this was not disciplinary action, and the governors were assured that they would be replaced by experienced permanent teachers.

This extraordinary decision was preceded by a summer of media scandal and hate mail, provoked by an assembly organised (in line with ILEA policy) to celebrate Mandela's birthday.

By Eleanore Kofman, Sue Lukes, Anne Johnson Labour Party members of the governing body

One teacher, who has links with some right wing education groups, complained of being harassed for not attending. In a little publicised decision, ILEA found the allegation unfounded.

Rather than defend its own policies, ILEA preferred to attack the staff, and keep parents and governors uninformed about their proposals.

The school has had trouble making curriculum changes parents and teachers felt necessary because of unfilled posts and the lack of a permanent replacement for the head who retired three years ago.

At the same time, the school was moved temporarily because of asbestos, cleaning hours were cut, and no permanent school keeper has been in post. Teachers became involved in escorting children to and from school because of racial harassment in the area.

In September, the Secretary of State for Education sent in a team of inspectors and also asked ILEA to investigate the Mandela Assembly.

When the governors requisitioned a meeting to discuss this, the acting chair of governors resigned, claiming the meeting had been called over her head.

In fact, she has been in contact with ILEA over the whole period, behind the backs of the other governors. Meanwhile, ILEA representatives failed to say anything at the governors' meetings about what they subsequently claimed were their serious worries about the school over three years.

The governors fixed a meeting with the inspectors for December 12th to discuss their report. But then governors were summoned to a meeting with the Chief Education Officer and the Director of Education (Schools), to take place on December 8th at 6.45pm.

At 2.30pm on the same day ILEA informed the press of the redeployment, four hours before the parents, teachers or governors were told.

ILEA claimed that the eight teachers were being redeployed because they had collective responsibility for the school's underachievement. ILEA refused to put its proposals in writing or be more specific. The governors rejected ILEA's proposals.

The following day, on Baker's instructions, the HMI report was published. While the report was not particularly positive, it differed substantially from ILEA's complaints.

The governors organised a well-attended parents' meeting, which overwhelmingly backed their stand, and a lobby of ILEA's Labour Group, which was given a petition signed by 137 parents.

ILEA organised their own "parents' meeting" in which they refused to allow teachers or other governors to speak!

ILEA backed down on a promise to provide permanent replacements. By the start of term three posts were covered "permanently", the rest on supply.

One of the eight teachers was leaving anyway to take up another post. Now, in an about-turn on their previous stand of "collective responsibility", ILEA have allowed two of the eight back to the school.

The redeployed teachers are sitting at home, angry and depressed. The governors are discussing whether to continue with attempted legal actions.

Supporting the governors' stand, with a concerted attack on anti-racist policies from both Tories and right wing Labour, with trade unionists regularly threatened and victimised, and with real parents' control over education under attack from the Tories, the campaign to defend Highbury Quadrant must be taken up nationally.

Socialist Conference

JANUARY

Sat. 21st. **West London** Conference (see article).

Sat. 28th. **Education Conference.** 10.30-4.00. Sheffield. Contact: Martin Yarnit, 14 Charnley Close, Sheffield S11 9FP. (0742) 585005.

Sun. 29th. **Fundraising Party.** Contact: 9 Poland Street, London W1V 3DG.

FEBRUARY

Sat. 4th. **Socialism & Scotland.** 10.00-5.00. Albert Hall, Stirling. Contact: Margaret Stewart, 36 Queen Street, Stirling. (0786) 73222.

Sat 4th. **West Midlands:** Building for Socialism. 10.00-4.00. Coventry Polytechnic, Priory Street. Contact: P. Purnell/J. Wilton, 25 Worlds End Ave, Quinton, Birmingham B32 1JF.

Sat. 25th/Sun 26th. **Women for Socialism** Conference. London Women's Centre, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2.

MARCH

Sat. 11th. **Health & Safety** Dayschool, Birmingham. Contact: Sheila Cohen, 25b Elmore St, London N1 3AW. 01-354 5723; 01-250 3434 x 224.

APRIL

Sat. 1st/Sun. 2nd. **Anti-NATO Conference.** Hammersmith Town Hall, London. Contact: Campaign for Non-Alignment, Red Rose Centre, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7. 01 263 9450.

Sat. 8th/Sun. 9th. **Gorbachev & the European Left.** Conference, with Eastern and Western European speakers. University of London Union, Malet St, London WC1. Contact: Gus Fagan, 30 Bridge Street, Oxford OX2 0BA. 0865-723207.

MAY

Sat. 13th. **National Convention for Democratic Rights.** Contact: Mike Marqusee, 01-341 9203.

Sat. 20th/Sun 21st. **Local Government Conference.** Rochdale (provisionally). Contact Tony Trehy, 7 East View, Mitchell St, Rochdale OL12 6SF. 0706-526624.

JUNE

Sat. 17th/Sun. 18th. **Third Socialist Conference.** Octagon Centre, Sheffield University.

NOVEMBER

Sat. 11th/Sun. 12th. **Building the Left in the Unions.**

STOP THE DEPORTATIONS!

Peru/Britain: the torture continues

Carlos Calderon is a member of the TGWU South West London ACTSS Branch.

Eight years ago he escaped from imprisonment and torture in Peru and eventually came to Britain looking for shelter.

Now the Home Office is refusing him refugee status and is trying to deport him.

Carlos comes from Lima, Peru's capital city. Despite his poor background, Carlos won a university scholarship in 1975: but as a student union leader he was arrested without trial twice.

In 1979 Carlos was arrested after addressing a meeting of striking miners. During this third term of imprisonment he was savagely tortured, resulting in pneumonia.

Ironically, this probably saved his life. He was taken to hospital under armed guard, from where doctors and student friends smuggled him out of the country.

By Celia Dignan Co-Chair TGWU South West London ACTSS

The Home Office is refusing to grant Carlos' request for political asylum, even though he is backed by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, who support his testimony of torture.

The Home Office say that Peru's new civilian government makes it safe to return. It is not that straightforward.

Peru today remains as dangerous as it was under military rule. Human rights groups such as Amnesty International, the UNHCR, and Americas Watch, testify to the continuing widespread abuse of human rights. Even the British press has been forced to recognise the continuing atrocities.

In 1986 political prisoners in several prisons staged protests. The government sent in the army and over 500 prisoners were murdered, including a massacre in the very prison where Carlos had last been held.

Everyone except the British government can recognise that Carlos clearly has well-founded fears for his life if he is forced to return to Peru.

The Carlos Calderon Defence Campaign, which is supported by Ron Todd and the T&GWU nationally, needs your support to overturn the Home Office decision.

You can help by:

- passing motions of support at your Labour Party or union branch;
- writing in support of Carlos to the Home Office;
- raising funds and getting donations for the campaign;
- joining the Carlos Calderon Defence Campaign, which meets monthly.

Contact us c/o 25 The Chase, SW4 0NP. Tel: 249-3768

WEST LONDON

Our first Conference!

The West London Socialist Conference takes place in Hounslow on January 21st.

By Peter Purton Conference Secretary

It'll be the first ever meeting of socialist activists from across the outer London Boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow and Hillingdon and an important opportunity to strengthen links and common struggles.

There are to be workshops on many aspects of the class struggle organised by local campaigns.

The Conference will particularly stress the struggle in local government led by anti-cuts Councillors and the Ealing Fightback Campaign.

Fighting "New Realism" in the unions and the campaigns of lesbians and gay men, black people, and people with disabilities also feature.

It is hoped to launch a campaign on Ireland from the event.

Visting celebrities include Tony Benn, Bernie Grant and Betty Heathfield.

Details: Civic Centre, Lampton Road, Hounslow. 10.00-5.00. Contact: WLSC, c/o 21 The Watertower, Southall, Middx.

Housing

New Act meets tenant opposition



PHOTO: Nick Hazlewood

The 1988 Housing Act, to be phased in from January, presents the severest challenge yet to Local Authorities' role as providers of mainstream rented housing.

The Act allows for wholesale privatisation of Council estates: through government imposed Housing Action Trusts (HATs); or through the euphemistically named "Tenants' Choice" — really a charter for private developers or predatory Housing Associations to buy up entire estates.

Tenants would be balloted, but all empty properties and non-voting households on the estate will count as a "yes" vote to privatisation — hardly a democratic system.

Tenants everywhere are horrified, and have been organising to meet the Tory challenge.

In the London Borough of Ealing, meetings organised by tenants themselves have regularly attracted over half the total population of the estate. Petitions have been collected, even where major repair and maintenance problems exist.

In the Tory Borough of Wandsworth the campaign became an extension of local anti-privatisation work already underway.

In many places "dummy" ballots have been organised with an overwhelming rejection of private landlords. In Moelwyn Hughes Court in Islington, 100% opposition was recorded.

By Kevin Veness
Ealing North CLP
and
Peter Chowney
Hackney South & Shoreditch CLP

It is essential that local CLPs and trade unions involve themselves in, and support, these tenant campaigns.

Anti-privatisation campaigns must be based on maintaining and improving services and increasing tenant and worker participation in determining those services.

Labour Councils which continue to cut front line services and centralise power are directly responsible for tenant despair and demoralisation. Campaigns against estate sales must be linked with a clear commitment to front line services.

Attempted transfers to new landlords through tenant ballots have so far been largely unsuccessful.

Tenants in Rochford (Essex) and Gloucester voted against transfer. In Torbay in Devon, there was a two to one vote against transfer, but a majority of tenants failed to vote.

Under the Act, 50% have to vote for transfer to go ahead. But Torbay Council are seeking the Secretary of State's permission to go ahead with the sell-off anyway, due to a technicality regarding the timing of the vote before the "50% clause" became law.

Pre-Housing Act privatisation deals have generally been disastrous. Following GLC abolition, Thamesmead Estate in Greenwich, a GLC-managed estate, was sold off. Tenants now have 27 different service charges to pay and the company running the estate is making large profits out of them.

The government's war of disinformation has developed a new method in Hackney, where at least three Tenants' Associations have been approached directly by Tory Party Central Office.

In Northwold Estate the Tenants' Association Chair was persuaded to stand as the Tory candidate in a Council by-election. She was unsuccessful.

But the covert role now being played by Tory Party officials in infiltrating inner city TAs is deeply worrying. The quality of counter propaganda offered by Labour Councils has so far left a good deal to be desired.

The campaign issues are not always so simple. In Westminster, tenants of Walterton and Elgin estates aim to take over the management of their own homes to block the sale of the estate by the Tory Council.

Such uses of regressive legislation for radical purposes are always tricky: in this case, fighting against a strongly anti-tenant Tory Council and opposing the grossest kind of undemocratic privatisation, the tenants probably deserve every support in turning Tory legislation back on its originators.

With campaigns emerging spontaneously all over the country, co-ordination of effort and sharing of experience is vital.

Over the next few months *Labour Briefing* will feature campaigns nationwide in the hope that we can learn from each other's experiences. This will only happen if you write in! Send your reports to 39, Talia House, Manchester Road, London E14 9HB.

Southwark report

Fighting the HATs

Tenants active in the Brandon Estate Tenants' Association (BETA) recently set up a Housing Act Working Group.

Dave Mitchelmore
BETA Member

This has come out of systematic work by BETA members over the serious implications of the Act.

We held informal discussions at the time of the House of Lords lobby where we went through the threats posed by the Act.

The next move was to organise a petition of the 700 households on the Estate against any move to sell off any or all the Estate.

This petition was handed in at the Lords lobby and we're now trying to get round to any remaining tenants to get as close to 100% backing as we can for a duplicate petition to go to the government-inspired Housing Corporation.

Our estate isn't in the top of the HATs, but BETA are convinced that we need to gear ourselves up for any overture from private landlords. Our TA is proud of what we've achieved and of our relationship with Southwark Council.

Although we've got a hard core of dedicated tenants, we need to enlist the help of as many people as possible. This must be coupled by linking up with other TAs and Town Hall workers.

Broadwater Farm Frame-ups

Spring protest planned

The good turnout for our picket of Wormwood Scrubs on December 12th was of great comfort to the families and the guys inside the Scrubs at a time when it was important to them.

We feel that a politically significant coalition of forces — determined to oppose the state's attacks on our communities and our rights — is being forged in the struggle to get justice for Mark Braithwaite, Engin Raghip, Winston Silcott and other framed youth.

The picket was a small, but important step in that process.

Leave to appeal against the convictions has now been turned down. Although we had no illusions about the ability of the court to give us justice, it was a personal blow to many.

Nevertheless, we are more determined than ever to continue our campaign.

The refusal to grant an appeal proves once and for all that British "justice" will not give these men a hearing unless it is forced by popular protest.

We therefore plan to step up the pressure, and we ask for your continued support to help us do so.

By Shaun Waterman
Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign

The next mass mobilisation we are planning will mark the second anniversary of the convictions. We want to march through Wood Green and Tottenham and rally on the Farm on Saturday March 18th.

We hope to mobilise both nationally and locally. We ask you to stay in touch with the Defence Campaign and to distribute literature about the march.

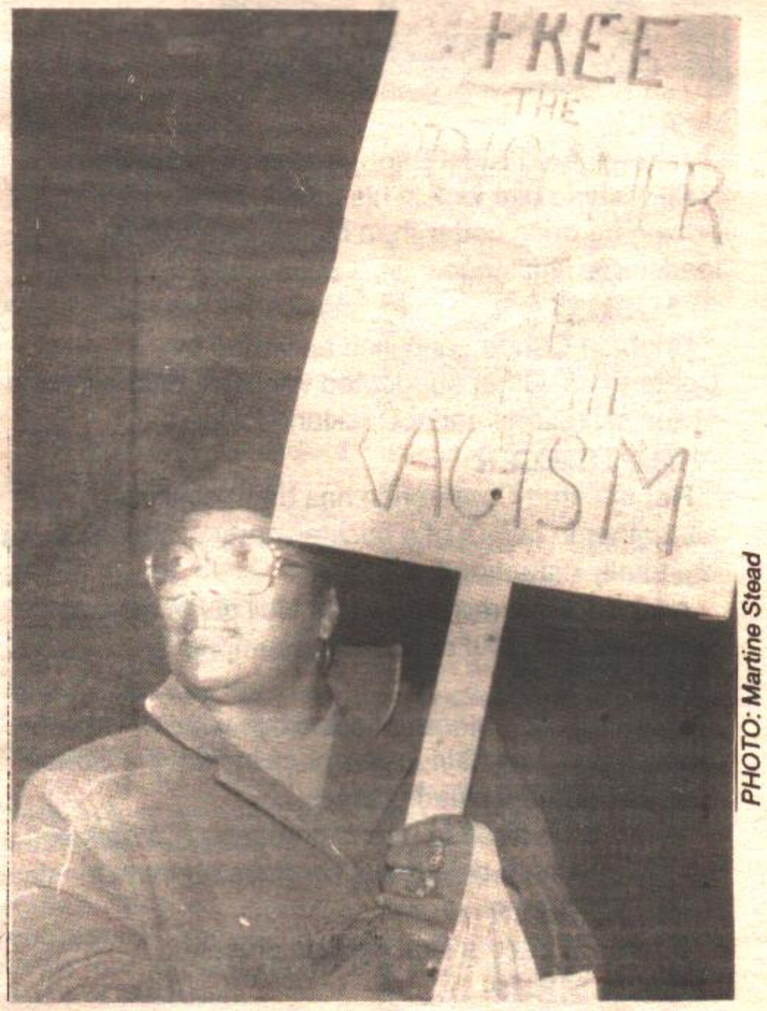


PHOTO: Martine Stead

Demonstrator at the Wormwood Scrubs picket last December. Contact the Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign at 79, Tangmere, BWF Estate, London N17. Tel. 01-885 3752.

International Women's Day

Solidarity with Irish women prisoners

Each year on International Women's Day, solidarity pickets have been held outside prisons where strip searching is used against Irish women political prisoners.

Women and men have taken the opportunity on this day to salute women involved in the struggle for justice throughout the world, to express solidarity with the brave incarcerated Irish women who have taken a stand against British occupation, and to demand an end to the degrading torture of strip-searching.

In 1988, International Women's Day was marked by a mass picket of Durham Gaol called by the Irish Republican POW Campaign, attended by hundreds from all over England and Scotland.

A women's planning meeting will be held to organise International Women's Day action for 1989. All concerned women and women delegated from organisations are welcome.

The meeting will be on Saturday January 14th, 1pm, Sparkhill Social and Multicultural Centre, Sparkhill Library, Stratford Road, Birmingham 11.

Funds are desperately needed to ensure a fitting and substantial solidarity action. Please send donations (cheques payable to IRPOW Campaign) to Irish Republican POW Campaign, Angela McAndrew, Lee Minto, c/o PO Box 540, Sparkhill, Birmingham B11 4AU, from whom further details can be obtained.

1989

A List of Predictions

JANUARY

Appearing on *Newsnight*, Kinnock shocks Party faithful. When asked his views on "internationalism", he replies:

"The international is of paramount importance to me. Why, only last week I got tickets for England v. Albania. Peas in a pod, me and Bobby: two blokes doing a good job building a winning team."

FEBRUARY

Neil and Bryan agree to speak at a *Smash the Clause* demo, but beat a hasty retreat when they realise the Clause in question is numbered 28, not 4.

MARCH

In the biggest wave of expulsions since the last one, Neil and the LCC refer evil Trotskyist Denis Healey to the NCC. He is accused of producing and distributing literature with the Redgraves.

Denis points out that they are confusing him with *Gerry* Healy, who was kicked out of the Party 30 years ago.

Just to be on the safe side, the NCC recommend expulsion.

APRIL

More of the same. This time it's Bernie Grant. They're after him for being on the *Militant* Editorial Board.

MAY

Neil's paranoia grows ever more evident. He attends a Fabian Society fund-raising rugby match.

All is going well until poor Neil storms at Glynis: "Did you hear that? They say the Fabian Society's playing to the left now..."

Glynis tries in vain to comfort him, saying "No they're not, silly, they've just changed the direction of play after half-time."

Nonetheless, an inquiry is called into the Fabian Society.

JUNE

Glynis is summoned before the NCC for calling the Party Leader "silly".

Other major events this month include the publication of interesting articles in *Labour Party News* and *New Socialist*.



Can Labour play without its left wing?

JULY

A bewildered Nigel Benn receives a letter from Neil, wishing him luck in his boxing career and hoping he does better than he did in the 1988 leadership challenge.

AUGUST

Brighton Centre cancelled as venue for Conference. Other suggested venues include various alpine ski resorts and a Docklands wine bar.

SEPTEMBER

Reports that Conference has been cancelled altogether in favour of a cocktail party at Stringfellows are totally unfounded.

A landmark is reached when Neil gives a press conference without saying "loadsamoney".

OCTOBER

Opening of Conference coincides with the launch of the new BMW. Delegates pack includes a filo-fax and pair of red-framed glasses.

There is no need to attend conference. Votes can be phoned in on delegates' cordless phones.

NOVEMBER

Shares in Labour Party plc go on sale.

DECEMBER

Another investigation. This time into that vilest of organs, *Labour Briefing*. Expulsions imminent.

Local Government

A cut above the rest

A year after many London Labour Councils, in a bid to placate the District Auditor and retain office, reneged on their manifesto commitments and cut jobs and services, their budgets lie in tatters and further financial crisis looms.

The result has been further cuts, on a scale usually only seen during annual budget setting, just to surive the year.

Right wingers across London set themselves the task of managing the cuts , so that they could be implemented in a "caring" and "socialist" manner.

Right from the beginning we said that this could not be done. As the financial year 88-89 draws to a close, there is plenty of proof that we were correct.

Over the summer right wingers in Brent pushed through a cuts package against mass opposition, but even this wasn't enough to bring their budget under control.

After predictions of a further £17.3m deficit this year the treasurer used his new powers under the Local Government Act and served a 114.3 notice.

This means that all expenditure is frozen until the Council establishes criteria for spending and a system of monitoring which will reduce the deficit.

All new and existing expenditure is then reviewed acording to these criteria, with the District Auditor as the final arbiter of whether expenditure is necessary or not, and whether the Council has done all it can to reduce the deficit.

If Councils are deemed to have spent irresponsibly then individual Councillors and Council officers are liable for surcharge.

If a Council has done all it can, in the view of the District Auditor, then it is allowed to carry forward some of the overspend into the next year, where it will have first call on the 89/90 budget.

A 114.3 notice has also been served in Haringey.

By Mandy Mudd
Tottenham CLP

Right wing Councillors are happy to hide behind a 114.3 because it gives them a mechanism for making cuts without actually having to name them or draw up a package which would provoke opposition.

In order to make the kind of "savings" they need they know they will have to do unacceptable things like raise rents, cut school meals, cut voluntary sector grants, and make compulsory redundancies.

If such packages were put to Labour Groups, many of the centre who have uneasily supported the cuts might feel unable to vote for them.

As a result of the 114.3s the cuts will be made in a fragmented way, isolating people and sectionalising struggles.

In the short term the use of the 114.3s in Brent and Haringey has staved off further curts programmes since the financial filtering will delay decisions.

If the District Auditor agrees, about £3m of Haringey's £7.5m deficit will be carried forward to 89/90.

In most Boroughs more people than necesary took voluntary severance and hundreds more have left since because they could no longer stand the deteriorating conditions. The result is that most services are already at the point of collapse.

Haringey's main library was closed for a day early this month because one worker was sick and no one would authorise expenditure for a relief. Fifty classes were sent home because no on e had authorised supply teachers' salaries to cover for vacancies.

A Down's syndrome child who was integrated into mainstream education was sent home because his support worker was on a temporary contract and no one had authorised its renewal.

One of the major factors behind the overspend everywhere is the cost of homelessness, and this will continue to grow uncontrollably in 89/90.

The political solution to this is to stop selling Council houses and embark on a massive programme of Council house building.

The right talk about better management and speeding up repairs and rehabs. But when set against the cale of the crisis, these improvements are cosmetic.

Their other solution is to change the definition of homeless to "roofless" (the statutory minimum).

What this means is that Labour Councils are quite prepared to scapegoat the homeless for their own unwillingness to take on the government.

Unless a united campaign for more resources starts and the cuts stop we shall soon see the tabloid press full of stories about how spending on lesbians and gay men, black people and minority groups is responsible for cuts in front line services.

Labour Councils will not be able to withstand the backlash.

The move to shift resources to "key front line services" is already gaining ground in London. In Hackney, a £30m cuts package is being debated in order to fund an education service after the break-up of ILEA.

Large rate increases could also come next year. In Lambeth, which has bridged its £2-3m revenue deficit this year by using capital reserves, a 30% rate increase is needed to break even.

In Brent there was talk of a 10% rate increase before the current financial crisis hit, and with the budget likely to be £40m adrift in 89/90, the sky is the limit.

In Haringey the rate increase could be between 12 and 20%.

Yet in all these Boroughs people will have reduced, poorer quality services. Despite the rate rises, next year at this time budgets will be in crisis once again.

Increasing the rates has never been a solution, but only the foolish can still believe that it will be electorally acceptable in these circumstances.

It is still not too late to mount a united campaign in defence of local government or for Labour Councils to stand firm with their workers and service users, but time is running out.

At the moment, Chief Officers and the District Auditor run Haringey and Brent Town Halls because the Labour Councillors allow them to.

They should recognise that they have little power and that their office is a sham. The time has come for them to join forces with those outside and engage in a real struggle against the Tories.

Labour Party Democracy Debate

Left looking Conservative?

In its pre-Christmas issues, *Labour Briefing* opened its pages to a debate on how to defend and democratise the block vote.

Too often the Labour left leaves itself open to the accusation that we are conservative defenders of an undemocratic status quo.

The LCC has jumped into the space we have left, championing the cause of "one member, one vote", attacking the block vote and the very nature of the trade union link itself.

It is high time that we exposed this hypocrisy. You cannot champion democracy whilst promoting witch-hunts and expulsions and arguing for the Labour Party to adopt the continental social democratic model.

Tony Benn's call for a conference to reconstitute the Labour Party deserves consideration. We should certainly support the proposal that socialist currents and social movements such as CND should be allowed to seek affiliation.

By Bryn Griffiths
Tottenham CLP

This could help to turn the Labour Party outwards to the ever growing number of extra-parliamentary struggles.

Benn's proposal that there should be votes for the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) at Conference is less attractive. The argument's appeal is that it would give us a common franchise with the electoral college and morally bind a PLP that has participated in Conference decisions.

But whom do the MPs represent, if it is not their CLPs and Conference itself? In this context, to enfranchise the PLP would be to accept the autonomy of the PLP to act as it feels.

The fact that the PLP participates in leadership elections is a weakness born of a compromise that was struck in the early 80s in an attempt to extend the electorate for the leadership.

What the Party needs is a PLP that carries out the decisions of Conference. We do not want to create a situation where the PLP tail is wagging the Labour Party dog.

Controversial

Keith Veness's views on OMOV, printed in *Briefing*, are also controversial. Keith is quite right to argue that where OMOV is imposed we should campaign hard amongst the membership to win the ballots.

As Keith knows, this was done to great effect in the Haringey CLPs where we secured two victories for Tony Benn.

But Keith goes too far. OMOV undermines the *collective decision-making structures* of the Party. It destroys the limited participatory forms of democracy that we have in the Party.

Direct democracy, accountability and participation in decision-making are principles that socialists must fight for. Keith gives them up far too easily.

It is important that this debate continues. We should not be hamstrung by a notion of what is acceptable to the present trade union leaders or even the left wing minority amongst them.

If the hard left is to respond to the Kinnockite initiatives on Party democracy, we have to set our own agenda. Failure to do so makes our opposition to Kinnock appear opportunist and conservative.

Stop "Cold War" Kinnock in his tracks

Unite to defend unilateralism!

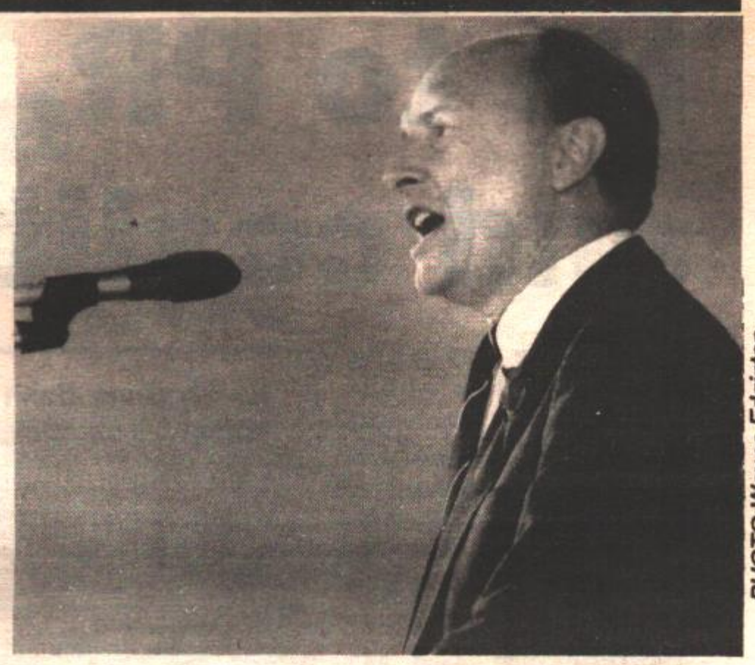


PHOTO:Wayne Edginton

It has been clear to many on the left for some time that one of Policy Review's main aims is to defeat the unilateralists in the Labour Party and wider labour movement.

This is an essential part of Kinnock's attempt to make the Labour Party acceptable to the ruling class and its mouthpiece, the media.

Warnings have been given at recent Annual Conferences of this intention. Last year Kinnock and the right hoped that Conference would pass a fudge resolution committing the Party to support for multilateralism, unilateralism and any other initiatives.

The pressure they put on delegates to get this motion passed produced a backlash, particularly from the Transport and General Workers' Union and Ron Todd, its General Secretary. This helped to ensure it was defeated and the unilateralist resolution passed.

This defeat for the right and Kinnock's double U-turn for the media (first dropping unilateralism and then appearing to "rehabilitate" it) were victories for the left. But they should not be over-estimated.

The Policy Review has always had a two year timetable. The right's intention is to win on "foreign policy", and in particular unilateralism, in the second year after a softening-up process.

The ease with which "phase one" of the Policy Review was adopted should be a warning to all.

By Pete Firmin
Labour Briefing
National Steering Committee

Kinnock has made support for the Policy Review an issue of confidence. As far as he is concerned, it is unacceptable to support him as leader and yet criticise the direction in which he is taking policy.

Many of those who support unilateralism have been complacent until recently, seeing Kinnock as a long-term devotee of unilateralism who would not ditch the policy.

Now that it has become glaringly clear that this is not true, some are fudging the issue and running from the inevitable battle.

"Foreign policy", and in particular defence and unilateralism, have always been a battleground between left and right in the Labour Party.

The bureaucracy has always been wedded to the idea of a "national interest" allowing for considerable common cause with the Tories.

Issues such as Irish independence or the Falklands/Malvinas war have seen Labour and Tory leaderships differing only on details, not on overall policy.

Although the Labour Party has had a policy of unilaterally abolishing nuclear weaponry for several years, the Party leadership has never seriously campaigned on the issue, explaining its importance and implications to potential Labour supporters.

It has been left to the media to attack the policy (supported by leading Labour figures such as James Callaghan in the middle of the 1983 General Election campaign) with no effective comeback from those supposed to be representing the Party.

Thus the policy has always remained at the level of paper support, with the Party officially doing nothing to support campaigns for disarmament, such as the Greenham Common women or CND.

The left has also fallen into the trap of seeing these paper victories as more than they are.

Resolutions

It has regarded the winning of resolutions as sufficient in itself, rather than as part of mobilising against weapons of mass destruction whoever happens to be in government.

This makes the right's job easier in their efforts to defeat the unilateralists this year.

The assault by the right will not be an isolated one on unilateralism alone. This will be tied to the need to "modernise" the Party, support Kinnock and "make the Party acceptable to the voters".

Arguments such as the "need not to be defenceless", will be part of a constant barrage against the unilateralists in the coming months.

There is a grave danger that the left will be over-complacent about the level of support which exists in the labour movement for unilateralism.

It will not take much of an effort by the right to swing support from some of the crucial trade unions, particularly if the left sits back in the assumption that it has the argument sewn up.

The attack on unilateralism will be a major aspect of the right's attempt to regain lost ground in the TGWU.

A campaign is required to unite all those forces which support unilateralism, regardless of their differences on other issues, which can take the issue into every union branch and conference, every Labour Party branch and CLP.

No one organisation, even those specifically organising around unilateralism, like Labour CND, has the resources to do this on the scale necessary.

Given the commitment to a serious joint effort, such a campaign could consider producing a bulletin and holding fringe meetings at every union and other conferences.

It could also be used to build support for the disarmament movement 'way beyond mere support for the a resolution at Labour Party conference. It would, in addition, be a serious setback for Kinnock's drive to move the Party to the right.

Such a campaign would unite organisations with a vast range of different views not only on other issues, but also on aspects of "defence" policy.

There will be those for instance, like *Briefing*, who believe we should push for Labour Party policy to include withdrawal from NATO.

Unity in defence of unilateralist policy should in no way prevent those organisations from raising these wider issues, any more that it prevents those who don't agree from arguing against them.

Sectarianism from either right or left, making preconditions for a united campaign, would only weaken our ability to beat back the attack on unilateralism. The stakes are too high to allow this to happen.

For these reasons the *Briefing* Steering Committee is sending out a letter inviting organisations to a meeting to plan a common campaign. If your organisation would like to attend the meeting, contact Labour Briefing at 39 Talia House, Manchester Road, London E14 9HB.

Witch-hunt
MANDY MUDD

Lobby on January 12th!.

The charges made against Tottenham CLP member Mandy Mudd will be heard on January 12th 1989.
Please join the lobby of Walworth Road from 12.30pm till 2pm.

Labour Party Black Sections

Where we stand on Composite 5

The following is an abridged version of a Black Sections position paper on the Party Conference decision on a black affiliate society by Mike Wongsam, Black Section National Treasurer.

We established the Labour Party Black Section in 1983 when the black vote was cynically treated by the Labour Party.

Over 50 Labour MPs owe their seats to the loyalty of the black community, and the efforts of our comrades in helping to turn out the black vote were taken for granted.

So we sought to secure for our communities a return commensurate to our voting power.

The aims of our movement were to:

•put black issues on the agenda of the Labour Party;

•gain automatic and democratically accountable representation on policy making bodies at all levels of the Party;

•radicalise the Labour Party by building a mass black membership.

An ideological war started when forces were mobilised in an attempt to kill the idea of Black Sections before it could turn into a real movement.

In this, *Militant* played the role of Kinnock's left flank in a dirty mud-slinging campaign, while Kinnock himself waded in with his infamous "*apartheid*" statements.

The 1983 Party Conference saw a succession of the leadership's black henchmen take to the rostrum to denounce Black Sections.

But having failed to snuff out the idea of black representation, the NEC embarked on direct harassment.

Our supporters were expelled from the Labour Party; prospective parliamentary candidates selected with our participation were replaced; Sharon Atkin was attacked for having the temerity to speak the truth and defy an instruction to keep out of Birmingham.

These measures also failed, so the NEC is now trying to minimise our movement by promoting splits, division in our ranks, and encouraging alternative, right wing poles of attraction for the organisation of black politics.

This is why every opportunity to weaken links between the Black Section and the black MPs has been exploited to the full.

This has led to a situation where the Party leadership has had to give way to the idea of some form of black representation, while at the same time trying to minimise the influence that our movement can have over the process of determining exactly *what type* of black representation should come about.

The only option left that has any chance of sustaining credibility is to defeat us politically from within the black community.

Mobilised

For this, right wing *black* politics will be used, not from within the Black Section, but mobilised against the politics of the Black Section from among the godfather politicians who typify Labour's relations with the black community.

Composite 5 is a recipe for testing the politics of the Labour Party Black Section *inside* the black community.

Historically, Composite 5 is actually *a retreat on the part of the Party leadership*, a tactical retreat towards more favourable ground, on which it is *possible* to enlist the assistance of the black godfather politicians in minimising the influence of the Labour Party Black Section.

We have to respond to this change in framework and treat it as a basis for a new discussion in and outside the Party.

However, it should not be seen as a concrete proposal. Such a view would compromise our position. It would mean that all discussion would be reduced to comment and criticism on the resolution, and failure to impose our own view of black representation.

We strive to establish Black Sections to enable a radical black perspective to be expressed in policy deliberations. We should not confuse the means with the end — any means that enable us to make this type of contribution to the Party's discussions should be viewed on its merits.

The real debate to have with the Party's leadership is therefore what formula under Composite 5 would enable the interests of black people to be expressed adequately?

Immediate

Our goals in the immediate period are the following:

•To attain a dominant position *politically and on the ground* in the black community. This means first and foremost going out and popularising *The Black Agenda* and the politics contained within it among black community groups.

•To win the debate on black-only organisation and automatic representation under the terms of Composite 5. This is our minimum requirement. Nothing else meets our organisational aims and objectives.

•To conduct the discussion in the full light of public scrutiny, so that we are seen to be leading the process, and not suspected of doing deals, compromising, or selling-out our aims and objectives.

Our own proposal should be formulated according to the following:

•The Party constitution should be suitably amended to provide for the establishment of a separate section of the NEC, Regional, District, and Constituency Labour Parties, exclusively for black people, and that delegates to these bodies be elected by a single black organisation/forum. This section should be distinct from the Socialist Societies section, etc.

•This single black forum should have its own statutes compatible with those of the Labour Party, its own finances, and make its own policy. It should therefore have its own administration and elect officers.

•Its membership should be open exclusively to people of African, Caribbean or Asian descent who define themselves to be black and are members of, or are eligible for, membership of the Labour Party.

Whose "democracy" is it?

No to PR, pacts and coalitions!

Given the growing demoralisation about Labour's electoral prospects, it is not surprising that some sections of the Party have turned to Charter 88 and proportional representation as a means of combatting Thatcherism and its encroachment on our democratic rights.

The LCC, along with Robin Cook, Austin Mitchell, John Cunningham. Jeff Rooker and Anne Clwyd, has now taken up the call for PR.

MPs close to Kinnock, such as Dr Reid and John Evans, have argued for an electoral pact with the centre parties.

This is the context in which Charter 88 was born.

The Charter has gained some support from people on the left. To those comrades we must patiently explain that Charter 888 is not a working-class based movement, and to support it is to abandon the strategy of a working-class united front in favour of a popular front that straddles and blurs class lines.

The Charter has bought the support of the likes of Lord Jenkins, Lord Scarman and Anne Sofer at a price. There is no mention of Irish self-determination or civil rights, nor of the demand of the Scottish people for an Assembly, nor any call for devolution.

The Charter suffers from a purely parliamentary focus, ignoring the extra-parliamentary struggles that are essential to any fight for democratic rights.

But its popular front, coalitionist basis is most clearly demonstrated by its support for PR, a demand that comes from the small centre parties and now espoused by the more defeatist elements on Labour's right-wing.

Socialists

Why should socialists see PR as an enemy? After all, isn't the present electoral system blatantly unfair? And isn't it

By Graham Bash
Hackney North CLP
and Bryn Griffiths
Tottenham CLP

right that the distribution of seats in Parliament should closely resemble the distribution of total votes?

Yes, the present system is unfair. It is unfair because the real power — the unelected and unaccountable extra-parliamentary power of the Tories and their friends — doesn't lie in Parliament, but in the City boardrooms, the military, the secret service, the civil service and the media.

Whichever party wins *office*, capitalism retains *power*. Despite the vital importance of the democratic rights we still possess, bourgeois democracy is a fraud. PR would only serve to perfect that fraud.

Not one of the five majority Labour governments received a vote of more than 50% of the electorate, not even in the 1945 landslide. With PR, not a single majority Labour Government would have been formed.

Inadequate

Our view is that however inadequate, a Labour Government represents a gain for the working-class and vital experience on the road to real power. PR would deny us that experience for the forseeable future.

In the name of greater democracy, we would end up with fewer options than ever. PR, by its very nature, produces hung parliaments and coalitions. The inevitable post-election deals would render election mandates — a central plank of parliamentary democracy — impossible.

Labour's right-wing would always have a perfect alibi for ditching radical parts of its programme. The bourgeoisie would enjoy a constitutional guarantee against a Labour Government with an electoral mandate for anti-capitalist change.

With little electoral pressure to hold it together, the Labour Party could begin to disintegrate, and the trade union link could itself be threatened.

Such developments would be welcomed by some socialists enticed by the idea of electing a dozen or so revolutionary MPs. For them, this process would be part of the necessary break-up of Labourism.

Contrary

We take a contrary view. The creation of the Labour Party and its link with the trade unions is an historic conquest for the working-class.

However bureaucratised, whatever its political limitations, the very existence of a unitary structure for the labour movement provides a forum for united working class action.

Its break-up would be a massive defeat, which would strengthen, not weaken, reformism. The working class would thereby be less able to take the power into its own hands.

Our perspective offers no short-cut solutions. The ten years of Thactcherism have been the direct consequence of demoralisation after five years of fudging and betrayal by a right-wing Labour Government. Thatcherism is the price we have paid for our failure of take on and defeat the right-wing leaders of the Labour Party and the unions.

Our movement faces a deep crisis which requires profound solutions. In this context, Charter 88 will be seen as an ephemeral diversion.

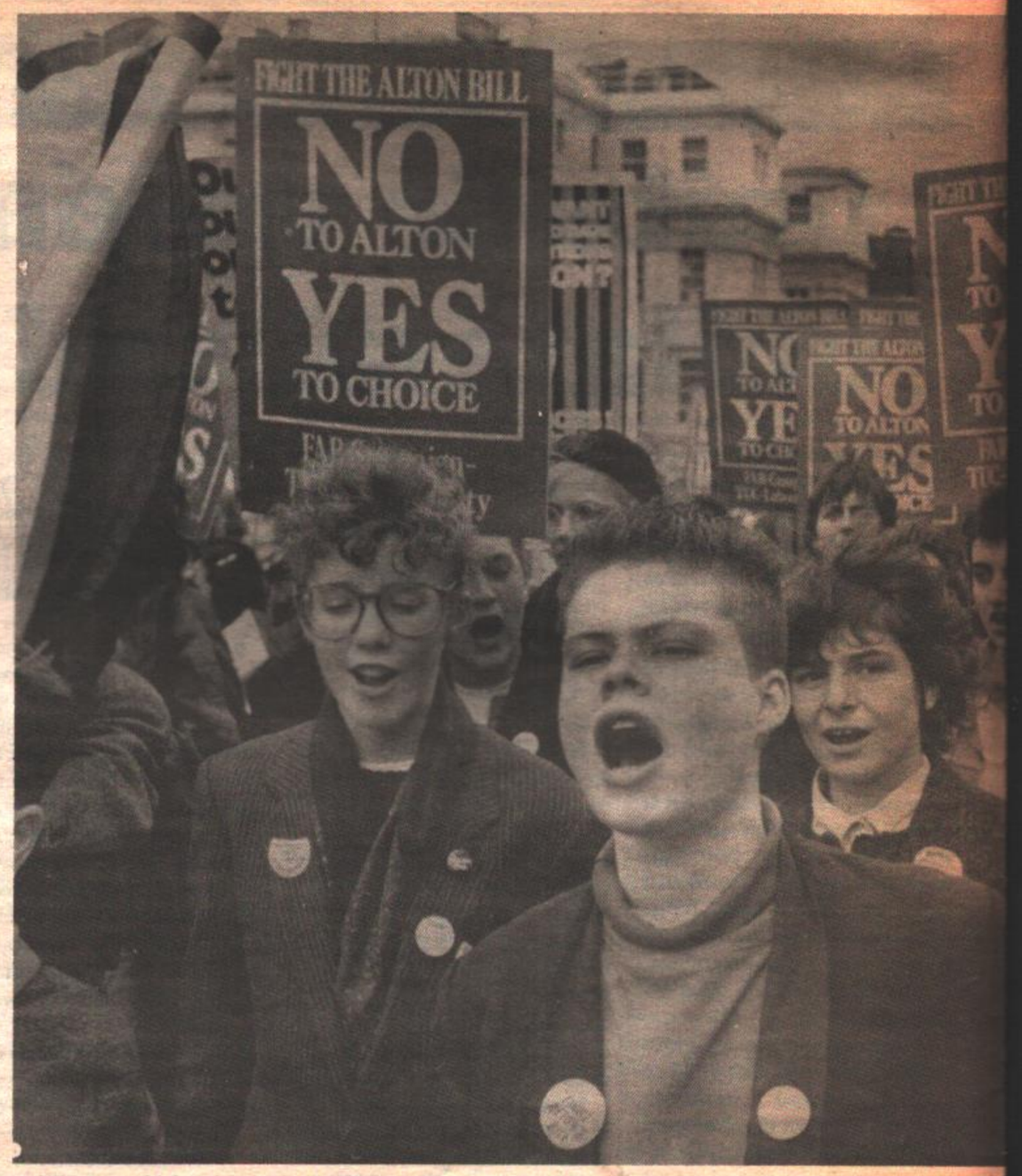
Our task is to regenerate the base of the labour movement, rebuild our haemmoraging class organisations and struggle to construct a revolutionary leadership within the Labour Party and the trade unions.

It is a lifetime's task. Unfortunately, there is no alternative.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

The Labour Party and its linked to the trade unions: Ron Todd and Bill Morris on the TGWU delegation to 1988 Annual Conference.



Which would the signatories to Charter 88 support? FAB campaigners marching for a woman's right t the "rule of law", to legislate what women can do with their bodies? PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Charter 8

Challenge and F

For many of the socialists who signed Charter 88, its demands for constitutional reform are ultimately a challenge to the power of the City!

The dominant position and powers of the City, the Bank of England, and the Treasury has been sustained by Britain's unwritten constitution. This has not, however, always been apparent; the powers that the legacy of 1688 gives to the Prime Minister have never been used as crudely as Thatcher uses them now.

During the first two decades after the war, the boom created conditions in which the City's interests could be pursued simultaneously, if tensely, with those of labour (the welfare state, full employment) and domestic industrial capital.

The rise to power in Britain of the free market right — its ascent prepared by Labour Chancellors — represents the reassertion of the distinct interests of the City as the boom collapsed.

In this climate, the political conditions it needed to maintain its role — and its profits — as the financier of the West required an end to high public spending and integration of government with industry and the trade unions.

Thatcher has achieved this using all the powers that Britain's system of parliamentary sovereignty gives the executive. Powers which enable central government to abolish layers of local government, to restrict the right to strike, the right to trial by jury, the right to free assembly, to censor, and to shoot-to-kill in the name of "national security".

By Hilary Wainwright

Against this background, Charter 88 — with its demand for a written constitution that entrenches local and regional government and basic human rights, abolishes the Royal Perogative, replaces the House of Lords with an elected, democratic second chamber, and introduces freedom of information and a proportionate electoral system — challenges Thatcher where it matters.

However hedged some of the Charter's language, it challenges the democratic legitimacy of her power.

Charter 88 is an alliance, on paper at least, of people who object to this power from many different points of view. There are therefore formulations which are the result of negotiation and compromise.

The notion of "inalienable rights" is a notion about which I and others have doubts. The emphasis on law is ambiguous.

Many of us would have like to see social rights — for instance rights to work, adequate housing, free health care and education, to gender and racial equality — explicitly included in the Charter rather than simply referred to as issues for debate.

But to hold back support because of disagreements of this sort is to miss the point.

The Charter's main demands and its analysis (which points to problems deeper than "Thatcherism") challenge the legitimacy not only of Thatcher's regime but of Britain's whole political system. The left should treat this as an opportunity, regardless of our disagreements with many of the other signatories.

The public momentum of Charter 88 — 10,000 signatures so far, £40,000 donated, adverts to appear in regional, professional, trade union and specialist journals and magazines — provides a more favourable political atmosphere for militant campaigns to defend civil liberties.

It will also stimulate public debate, if the left presses it, about the elitist character of our political system and the blocks which it puts on socialist change.

By taking up this debate, the left in the Labour Party could deepen the challenge to parliamentary sovereignty begun by its reforms of the Party's own constitution in 1980/81.

The impetus behind these reforms was the desire to end the Labour Party's absorption into a political system completely cosseted from the pressures of popular sovereignty.

This needs to be followed up by direct attack on the state institutions that reproduce this rule. As



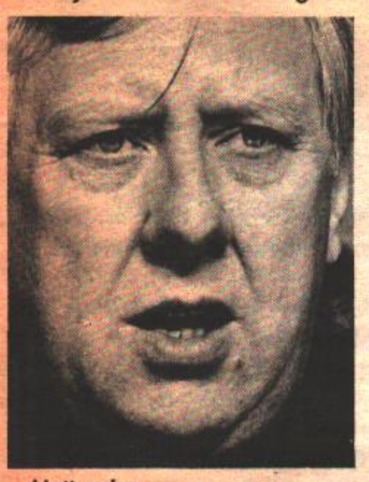
o choose, or the right of mainly white male MPs, by

8

Potential

Neal Ascherson put it, "it is not possible to build democratic socialism by using these institutions, in the way this it is not possible to induce a vulture to give milk."

In attacking Charter 88, Roy Hattersley implies that the unwritten character of Britain's constitution provides a flexibility that is handy for socialist change.



Hattersley

He writes as if the constitution was unwritten in the way that the rules of a dining club might be unwritten: no one could be bothered to jot them down.

He is blithely evasive — he can't surely be ignorant, with his experience as Shadow Chancellor — about the interests that are protected by the lack of public control embodied in such an arrangement.

I'm not arguing that written constitutions are inherently progressive. Sometimes they are; sometimes they are not. It depends on the political circumstances in which they are drawn up.

The demands of Charter 88, and the social and economic rights that socialists would want to add, could only be achieved as a result of massive popular pressure.

The resulting constitution might not be ideal, but it would provide very much more favourable conditions for socialism than the Charter for International Finance that we have lived under for the last 200 years!

Several commentators from the centre have sought to narrow the debate about the Charter, writing as if it *only* advocated electoral reform and as if it *also* advocated electoral pacts and a return to the good old corporatist consensus of the Lib-Lab pact.

It is urgent that the left widens the debate, seizing the opportunity which the Charter could provide to gain a wide audience for a socialism that seeks to destroy rather than vainly to use the undemocratic powers that Thatcher has so ruthlessly exploited.

This involves the left arguing the case for constitutional reform in its own terms and winning its own constituencies.

I urge *Briefing* supporters not only to sign the Charter but to organise debate on it in CLPs, trade unions, women's, black and other organisations and to help build the Socialist Conference's Convention on Democratic Rights.

Hilary Wainwright is a member of the Socialist Society. Her most recent book is *Labour: A Tale of Two Parties*

A closer look at Charter 88

Flunking the democracy test

In sounding an alarm on democratic rights and in drawing attention to the undemocratic nature of British state, Charter 88 is a pertinent intervention.

But in the end, Charter 88 fails to offer either the ideas or the methods necessary to meet and repell the Tory attack on democratic rights.

According to the Charter, the basic weakness of British democracy is the absence of a written constitution and Bill of Rights, and, concommitantly, of inbuilt checks on "elective dictatorship" and the "powers of the executive".

"Our central concern is the law," declares the Charter, summing up its own limitations in a nutshell.

By Mike Marqusee
Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

Now, socialists should not hesitate to demand a wide variety of legal and constitutional reforms.

We should see the fight for the fullest possible realisation of "bourgeois" democracy (including those basic conditions for political self-determination which go under the names of human, civil, or democratic rights) as integral to the struggle for socialism.

But we also recognise that democracy cannot be achieved simply by inscribing it in legal statutes. The power of a state fundamentally hostile to the interests of the majority of the population cannot be bridled solely by constitutional reform — no matter how far reaching.

Protection

The United States has enjoyed the protection of a Bill of Rights for nearly 200 years. Just how effectual that protection has proved can be judged by the experiences of Native Americans, black people under slavery and Jim Crow, leftists of all stripes during the Palmer Raids and the McCarthy period, Black Panthers in the late sixties, and so on.

And of course Stalin's 1936 Soviet constitution includes admirable commitments to civil rights. All utterly worthless in practice, as the Charter 77 activists who inspired Charter 88 can testify.

One of Charter 77's main functions has been to monitor and publicise human rights abuses in Czechoslovakia. There is no mention of this vital task in Charter 88. In fact, the Charter doesn't actually propose to do anything, except "call" for a number of reforms.

Among these reforms, there are critical omissions and some very odd inclusions.

First, the omissions. On Ireland, racism, lesbian and gay rights, trade union rights, self-government for Scotland and Wales, the police, immigration and asylum rights the Charter is in effect silent, even if it mentions some of them in passing.

The point about such questions is that they arise from sharp social conflicts which have led to serious violations of democratic rights. They arise, in short, from the concrete here and now of democracy in Britain, not the abstract someday of the Charter.

The point isn't simply that the Charter does not go far enough, but that its attempt to skirt awkward topics undermines the credibility of its general commitment to democracy.



Viraj Mendis: the second chamber Charter 88 wishes to retain, albeit in modified form, has just refused even to listen to his appeal.

History sets its own tests for civil libertarians.

In 1951 in the USA the test was the persecution of the Communist Party (a test dismally failed by most liberals).

In the 1980s in Britain the tests include persecution of lesbians and gays, Irish Republicans, miners, printers, the youth at Broadwater Farm, and Viraj Mendis.

Any serious movement for democratic rights in Britain must *start* by challenging these immediate, intolerable abuses. Of course, if Charter 88 had taken up these test questions, many of its prestigious sponsors would have bolted.

Explicitly

If it had explicitly called for the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, Section 28, the Immigration and Nationality Act, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, the Public Order Act, and the various anti-trade union acts the Charter would not only have spelled out the minimum realistic basis for a counter-offensive on democratic rights, but would have made it that much easier to unify and mobilise the groups affected by these Acts.

Instead, it goes for proportional representation, reform of the Lords, and subjection of executive powers to "the rule of law".

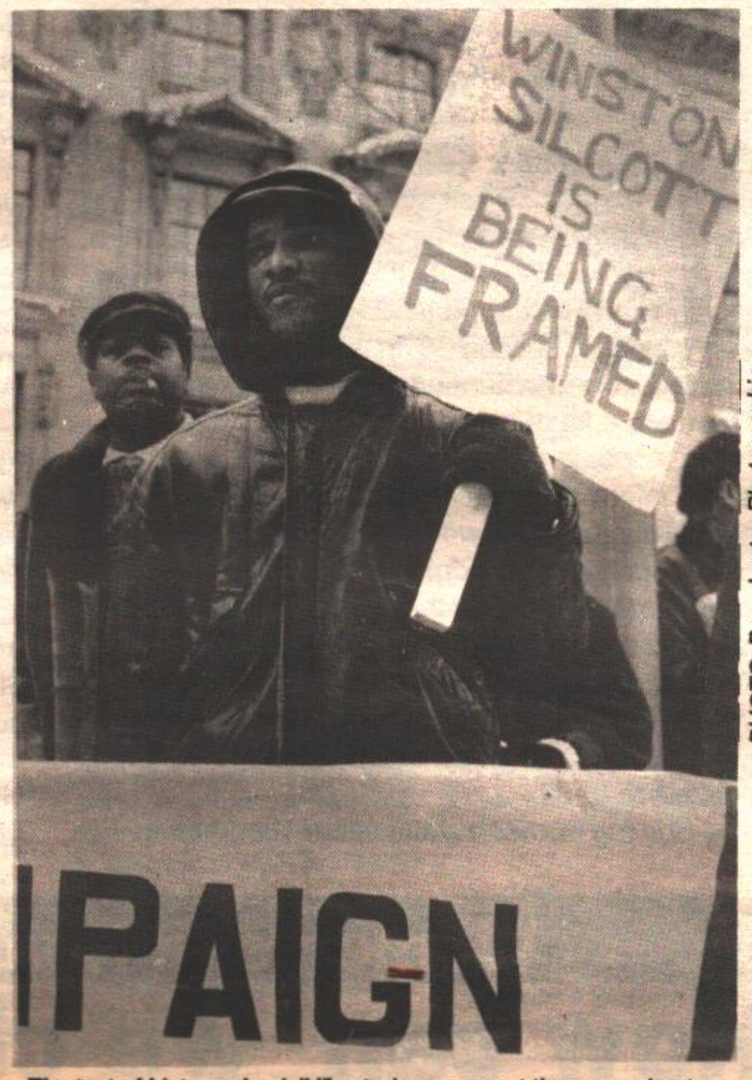


PHOTO: Broadwater Photographic

The test of history: do civil libertarians support the campaign to release the Tottenham Three, jailed after the Broadwater Farm incidents?

Whatever one thinks about PR, is it really tenable to claim (as the Charter does) that it is a principle of democracy co-equal with trial by jury, for example?

The inclusion of PR in the Charter excludes most of the Labour left, not least Tony Benn. Was that the intention of the Charter's architects?

Historically

As for reform of the Lords, just why do we need a second chamber at all? Historically, all second chambers have been designed to inhibit the exercise of popular sovereignty by a single, democratically elected assembly. They are intended to act as a check on excessive radicalism.

Is there any conceivable way in which the powers of delay and amendment currently enjoyed by the Lords could be democratically exercised? Here again, the Charter seems more interested in political compromise and social peace than justice and democracy.

No wonder it was so easily hi-jacked by coalitionists!

Building a real movement for democratic rights should be a major priority for socialists. The splash made by Charter 88 shows the widespread concern that exists; its inadequacies show that socialists cannot leave these questions to liberals and social democrats.

In the end, democratic rights will be defended by a militant social majority committed to them. Building such a majority is a natural task for socialists.

Convention

Towards this end, the Socialist Conference is planning to hold a National Convention for Democratic Rights in May. This Convention will try to bring together those most affected by the Tory attacks, prepare future mobilisations against them, and create a broader, deeper vision of democracy than the narrow, superficial focus of Charter 88.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Irish Republican campaigner Bernadette McAliskey addresses a solidarity rally in Hackney. After centuries of British rule and oppression, the withdrawal of British troops must be a high priority for British civil libertarians.

The Women's Page

Why a *Briefing* Women's Page?

As socialist feminist women involved in *Labour Briefing* we feel its time for a change.

New Year resolutions aside, there is a growing need for women to raise and discuss what's happening to women, both in this country and overseas.

By Leesa Herbert *Labour Briefing* Women

Everywhere women are involved in struggles, giving leadership to those struggles and juggling the many demands placed on them as women. Women are playing a leading role in trade unions, anti-cuts campaigns and anti-imperialist solidarity as well as in the fight against Section 28, in anti-deportation campaigns and in other anti-racist struggles.

There are a lot of women working in and around *Briefing*. A women's page will give us the opportunity to share information about women's struggles, and to organise ourselves as women who support *Briefing*.

Most importantly, a women's page will allow us time and space to gain a theoretical perspective that has grown out of women's lived experiences.

December 1988 saw the last ever issue of *Outwrite*, the only socialist feminist anti-imperialist newspaper produced by and for women. This is a great loss to us all.

The *Briefing* women's page cannot be another *Outwrite*, with extensive firsthand information on women's struggles internationally. It certainly is not intended to be a "*Guardian* women's page", focussing on so-called "women's issues".

We want women to continue their contribution elsewhere in the pages and production of *Briefing*. But we do feel there is a need for a women's page to provide a focus, a coherence and a space to enable us to draw out a socialist feminist analysis of the many struggles we are involved in.

At the last *Briefing* women's meeting in November we elected three women to co-ordinate the first three *Briefing* women's pages for this and the next two issues. Another three women will be chosen to take over this responsibility at the next *Briefing* women's meeting on January 14th. This is likely to be at Wesley House.

If you think the *Briefing* women's page is a good idea (or a bad one!), or you simply want to contribute, we'll be very please to hear from you. We will be meeting regularly to discuss our input into this page and other activities of women in *Briefing*.

We are hoping to re-establish a regular system of mailings to keep *Briefing* women in touch with each other. We are also considering the possibility of a conference or dayschool for *Briefing* women.

Write and let us know your ideas! Contact Leesa Herbert, 101 Vartry Rd, London N15 6QD tel. 01-444 5937 (up to 20.1.89), or 01-800 2792.

This first page is looking at women and the NHS. Although the majority of workers in the NHS are women, we are a minority of the decision making bodies. As patients we are affected by the continuing attacks on women's health care and as carers we are expected to provide what the state does not.

The articles below concentrate on these themes and on the continuing resistance of women to government attacks on the health service.

Briefing Women

Please send me further information about the activities of Briefing Women.

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

I am particularly interested in: .....

.....

Send to; Leesa Herbert, 101 Vartry Road, London N15 6QD.

Women and Health

How can we change the Health service?

There is a crisis in health in Britain — expressing deep rifts in our social relations.

As the gap between rich and poor widens, so the working class suffers disproportionately from long term disease, cancers, and mental illness.

There are the result of life-long strain, hardship, and insecurity. Mental ill-health likewise reflects widespread alienation, loneliness and lack of fulfilment.

Traditionally women have been responsible for their families' health. Now they are called on to prevent these new diseases — cooking fat-free, muesli-rich diets, encouraging exercise and the rest.

Women are urged to immunise their children, get their eyes tested, etc.

Black women in particular are identified in health campaigns as ignorant of the health service and deficient in providing for their family's health.

They sek to integrate black people into a racist health service.

But with limited income, resticted time and opportunity, women view these health messages as just another burdon.

Under the Tory onslaught on health and welfare services it is women who have increasingly taken the burden of care for the elderly and chronically sick.

The situation of forced, individualised care offers little support for the woman carer and often inappropriate help for the elderly person.

Women's health reflects these strains. Thousands of women seek the support of tranquillisers, every day.

Younger women, under contradictory pressures of work or unemployment, family and sexually conformist norms adopt health-threatening behaviour — smoking heavily, drinking more alcohol, and having unprotected sex.

By Pia Feig

These contradictions within women's lives have often been "medicalised" so that the woman is seen as ill (neurotic, in need of psychiatric help) rather than justifiably angry.

Women's dissatisfaction with their treatment at the hands of the medical profession led to the development of the women's health movement. This attempted to analyse women's health within its political context — in the social role, personal and physical condition in which women found themselves.

It was overtly critical of the treatment meted out to women by GPs and hospitals.

Its analysis remains relevant today. But when attempts are made to incorporate these ideas into mainstream health services, they are marginalised.

Often well-woman clinics are established — but dominated by medical personnel or funded on a temporary basis.

Doctors who do respect women's control over their medical treatment are hounded out of their profession (like the attacks on Wendy Savage). Abortion rights disappear under generalised cuts in gynacological services.

Women make up the major part of the workforce in the health service. But the form the lowest part of the bureaucratic structure: working as clerks, kitchen and cleaning staff or nurses.

Private medical and cleaning firms offer non-unionised, poorly paid, often casual work to women.

The TUC and the health service unions' bureaucracy have refused to take up a serious fight to defend the NHS. All opposition has come from the ranks of workers in the NHS — from women working as nurses and ancillary staff in particular.

It was unofficial action by nurses in Spring 1988 that forced the pay issue into the headlines — and walk-outs and strikes over re-grading where railroaded by union officials, before Christmas.

Thousands of nurses are now on long-term work-to-grade (like a work-to-rule) taking collective action against a management regrading that attempted to make nurses compete with each other for the meagre pickings on well-paid jobs.

(In one hospital in Manchester, 100 extra staff have been taken on to cover the work arising from nurses simply working to their designated grade.)

The health workers need the continuing support of other sections of the labour movement. Issues of pay illuminate the low level of commitment by the government to a free public health service.

It is only when the health service has a secure future that considerations of the nature of health and of a proper health service can take place.

For all our healths we need to support the health workers' struggles.

CHANGES AT THE EGA

Action Committee needs your help!

Yet again the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital for women is under threat.

In April '88 Bloomsbury Health Authority voted to merge the EGA with Soho Hospital for Women (the first women's hospital in the country) as a cost cutting measure.

By Leesa Herbert



In practice this has meant a 20% cut in gynaecology services, the closure of the Soho women's hospital with the loss of jobs and beds, and the introduction of male staff at all levesl of the EGA.

It's feared these cuts are the first moves to close the EGA and merge it with the Middlesex Hospital.

When it opened in 1866 the EGA was staffed by women — the porters, kitchen staff, boiler stokers, nurses and doctors were all women.

The EGA provided a supportive, women-only, environment essential to many women from cultural backgrounds prohibiting treatment by men, lesbians who prefer women-only medical treatment, women who have been raped, women who have had bad experiences of male doctors and women who choose to be treated and nursed by women.

Over the years men have started to work at the EGA as porters and even anesthetists. But until now the EGA has been the only NHS hospital where women can be sure of being treated by women.

Many EGA patients have delayed treatment by men and travelled miles to the hospital desperate for a women-only medical environment.

These cuts in the health service, that hardly recognises the specific health needs of women, have angered patients and staff.

In November the EGA Action Committee organised a demonstration and rally addressed by Jo Richardson, Wendy Savage, Frank Dobson, patients and staff.

The Action Committee have found it hard to mobilise the level of support the EGA had when it was threatened with closure in the 70's.

Jo Richardson recalled protesting by lying down in Euston Road with hundreds of other women!

The Action Committee feel sure closure is likely, and the Health Authority will meet less opposition if it is done in stages.

January 3rd saw the arrival of male doctors for the first time at the EGA. The Action Committee called a lobby and handed in a 10,000 signature petition to Thatcher (who, incidentally, on entering office publically supported the EGA and the principle of a women's hospital for women, run by women).

Bloomsbury Health Authority plan to review services at the EGA in six months — another example of the NHS run by women for women controlled by white male bureaucrats.

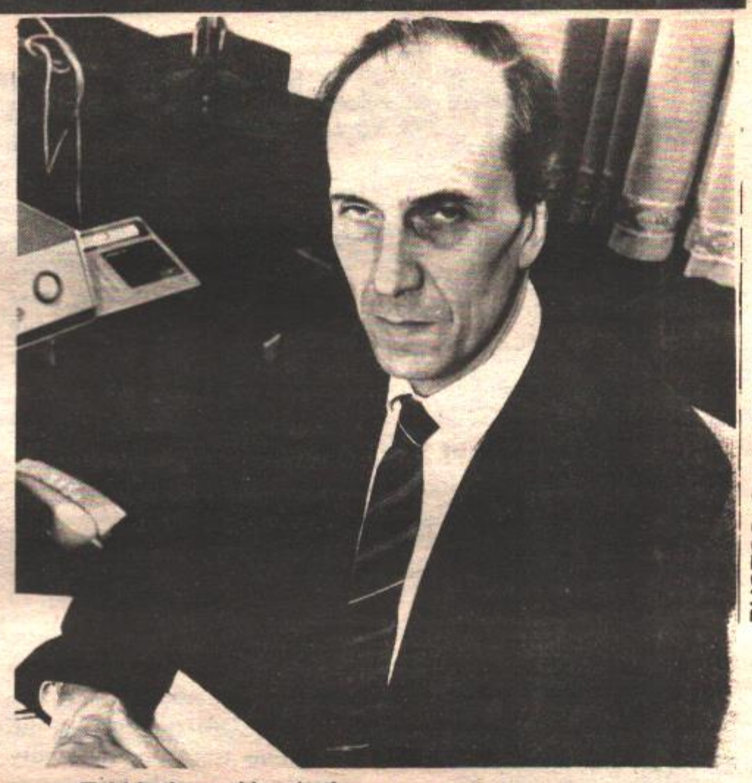
Meanwhile the EGA Action Committee plan to continue lobbying patients advising them they have a right to see a women doctor.

They also plan to try and get an early day motion in the House of Commons.

The EGA needs support! Contact c/o 26 Merryweather Court, Poynings Road, London M19 5ZF

BOOK REVIEWS

Intellectuals in Thatcher's thrall



PHOTOS: Graeme Cookson

Tebbit: the real inspiration

***Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left — the Hard Road to Renewal*, by Stuart Hall, *Verso*, £8.95 (paperback).**

***Thatcherism*, edited by Robert Skidelsky, *Chatto & Windus*, £18.**

This collection of Stuart Hall's essays (chiefly from Marxism Today and New Socialist) spans the period from his "seminal" The Great Moving Right Show in 1978 to the present.

Hall has always been more readable than many of his fellow Euro-communist theorists, but his methodology, like theirs, stems from the craze for post-Althusserian structuralist Marxism that swept through British academia in the 70s.

Re-reading Hall's Gramscian commentaries on the "specificities of the particular political conjuncture" (to use the jargon) I was struck by just how non-specific they are.

As is the way with much post-structuralist "Marxism", the categories employed are so abstract that they can be manipulated with hardly any reference to anything as old-fashioned as empirical data (i.e. facts).

Althusser, on the rebound from Stalinist economic determinism, declared the "relative autonomy" of cultural, ideological, and political fields from the economic base.

"Fundamentalists"

Hall, following in his footsteps, is fond of dismissing left wing opponents as "fundamentalists" or "reductionists".

But to set the record straight, it is his own Communist Party heritage which was in the past most guilty of assuming an automatic correspondence between the political and the economic (a habit apparently back in vogue with the discovery of post-Fordism).

His attacks on "fundamentalism" would carry more weight if he were to identify by name which individuals or groups actually endorse it. Instead, he uses it as a waste-bin into which opponents' arguments can be dumped without ever being answered.

Hall's account of the rise of "Thatcherism" starts off plausibly enough with the crisis-ridden Labour governments of the 70s and the break-up of the post-war consensus.

He rightly states that the Labour government's application of monetarism and incomes policy led to profound working class disillusionment and contributed to Thatcher's rise.

However, there are major problems with his argument that discontent with Labour's "bureaucratic and corporatist" practice led to a revolt from below which Thatcherism harnessed through "strategic interventions in popular life, the reactionary character of its social project... and its directive and disciplinary exercise of state powers" — for short, "authoritarian populism".



Thatcher: "Authoritarian populist"?

By Dave Palmer
Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

In this way Thatcher's "crusade" is presented as an almost entirely ideological phenomenon. It forged "new discursive articulations between the liberal discourse of the 'free market' ... and the organic conservative themes of tradition, family, and the nation."

According to Hall,there is only one way out — the construction of a "counter-hegemonic" strategy which can renew the left "by precisely occupying the same ground that Thatcherism does and building from that a different form of society."

Hall likes to cite the popular campaigning side of the GLC — Fares Fair, anti-racist carnivals, etc. — as an example of this strategy.

But its apogee, for him, is the "progressive humanism" of events like Band Aid, Live Aid, Sport Aid, and the Mandela concert. His paean to this phenomenon (co-written with the CP's Martin Jacques) is the worst part of the book.

Hall's separation of ideology from any specific economic or social practice, and his ascription to it of a privileged position in social relations, results in a kind of superstructural determinism, every bit as reductionist and selective as the old vulgar economism.

The irony is that Hall tells us little about the specific material role of ideology, how it shapes politics in "real life".

His vague but actually quite narrow framework prevents him from giving any account of how oppositional ideologies — anti-capitalist, collectivist, socialist — arise and become part of the process of social change.

No one denies that we occupy the same world as Thatcherism, but do we occupy "precisely" (and exclusively) the same world?

For Hall, the only political options available have already been posited within a dominant ideology ("commonsense") pre-ordained by capitalism. A magic circle that can never be broken! No wonder most Euros never leave their armchairs.

Hall's pseudo-scientific method leaves him utterly unable to shed any light on the concrete political choices facing real human beings.

Even on the question of the GLC, which is virtually the only specific political struggle to which he refers, he has nothing to say about the ultimate failure of the anti-abolition campaign, a model of the "popular" politics favoured by the Euros.

Public opinion overwhelmingly opposed abolition, but Thatcher, as we know, was unimpressed. Hall says nothing about the real options facing the left GLC leadership, nor about their political origins and the process by which they seized that leadership.

Of course, this would have required an honest and factually-based account of the role of the hard left — and *Labour Briefing* — which would have punctured many of the book's sweeping generalisations.

For anyone wanting to know about the brutish reality of Thatcherism, the last people to ask are the academics whose essays appear in Robert Skidelsky's collection.

Nine of the eleven authors are professors; all are men; none is black.

Well-heeled, well-placed, and blessed with the sense of detachment which comes from a fat wallet and a full stomach, none of them gets very annoyed or excited.

By JOHN LISTER

Skidelsky himself, an early SDP luminary, confesses his own "ambivalence", an ambivalence which is clearly propelling many of his type (not least David Owen) rapidly to the right.

Skidelsky claims that his contributors "span the political spectrum", and boasts that "no collection of essays on contemporary politics has ever drawn on such a wide range of political opinion and expertise".

But as we might expect this is the kind of "balance" we get from election night TV panels. The missing element is any coherent socialist or working class perspective.

The nearest to a left wing view is *The Times*'s favourite fabian, Ben Pimlott, who wheels out an apolitical argument for Labour to retain and build upon its links with the unions.

But he offers no insight into the politics of the union bureaucracies, nor any assessment of their role in imposing the "new realism" that has so weakened the Labour Party.

Indeed one basic problem of this volume's analysis of Thatcherism is that it is examined as a political phenomenon in and of itself, without any serious discussion of the political crisis of the labour movement that has been central to Thatcher's success.

Without the TUC leaders' deliberate isolation and betrayal of workers in struggle — from the steelworkers in 1980 to the P&O strikers in 1988, things could have turned out very differently for the Tories.

Ivor Crewe's article argues from a mass of opinion poll statistics what many of us know: that most of the electorate has not been politically convinced by Thatcherite policies.

The problem is that they are not being won to any socialist alternatives either. Labour's front bench, much more than the general public, has effectively surrendered to Thatcherite reliance on "the market".

Rantings

Skidelsky's political "spectrum" lacks the left but certainly includes the far right, with exultant ultra-Thatcherite rantings from Patrick Minford, a Tory advisor from the Alan B'stard school of politics, celebrating the "success" of the RESTART programme and the "unassailable morality" of compelling unemployed youth into training schemes.

Another B'stard soundalike, Kenneth Minogue, celebrates the emergence of the New Right, the eradication of the "culture of guilt" and the resurgence of unabashed, old-fashioned self-interest and traditional imperialist, racist arrogance, as symbolised by the Falklands War.

Prof Minogue's exultant sermon for selfishness is countered only by timid, moralistic arguments for "socialism". Ralf Dahrendorf quakes with indignation at Thatcher's "amoral" insistence that "there is no such thing as society; there are only individuals, and families."

But where does all this leave us in understanding Thatcherism?

Thatcherism does include many of the ideological components which the authors dwell on, but it has always been primarily about the relationship of class forces, about changing the *material* world.

"Bootboy"

Today's Thatcherism owes more to Norman "Bootboy" Tebbit, to the anti-union rulings of High Court judges, and to the brutal picket-line violence of thousands of police thugs than the intellectual inspiration of Keith Joseph or other far right gurus.

Without this material foundation, none of the social engineering projects would mean a thing.

Thatcherism in this sense is not so new: it is a modern-day revival of old-school authoritarian Toryism, the strike-breaking, scab-herding, means-testing Toryism of Stanley Baldwin in 1926; the union-busting, flag-waving Toryism of Churchill's wartime coalition, coupled with his post-war opposition to the NHS and the welfare state.

It is also a throwback to Victorian values, the Gradgrind tradition of nineteenth century employers, opposing any regulation of working hours, conditions or safety standards.

Skidelsky's anthology doesn't even ask the right questions, and is if anything further away from offering answers to this problem than Labour's own leaders. Save your £18 until a decent book comes along!

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NUR Profile

Leadership in need of derailing

The National Union of Railwaymen was 75 years old in 1988. There was not a lot to celebrate.

With the sudden but very welcome departure of Sidney Weighell in 1982 and the election of Jimmy Knapp as General Secretary, there had been hope that the NUR would become a fighting union.

But since then, though attacks have come fast and furious from British Rail, London Underground and other employers, the union has offered little response.

British Rail has been preparing the ground for privatisation:

•Travellers Fare has already been sold (to a management buy-out);

•British Rail Engineering Limited (BREL) has been decimated;

•Red Star parcels is being prepared for privatisation in the next 12 months.

Thousands of jobs have gone on the railways.

1982 saw the end of the 8-hour day and the introduction of flexible rostering after the defeat of the ASLEF (the drivers' union) strike. Nine years on, there is still no further reduction in the basic week of 39 hours.

Low pay, and hence massive overtime, is rife and a basic sick pay scheme for the majority of workers has still not been introduced.

BR now proposes to introduce a 3-day, 39-hour week for track workers (Friday, Saturday and Sunday at 13 hours a day with nothing extra for weekend working), despite the possibility that excessive working hours was one of the causes of the Clapham crash.

By two NUR members

The grade of guard has disappeared, and as Driver Only Operation comes into force there will be no trained staff on the back of trains.

The guard on one of the Clapham trains undoubtedly saved many lives by warning an oncoming train. He was simply doing his job, which will soon cease to exist.

Regional pay has been introduced. Workers in the South East will get "bonuses" for good attendance and performance.

Sickness, lateness, and time off for trade union activity will all be penalised. Staff will be encouraged to work even if they are ill. The travelling public and the workforce will be placed at risk.

Workers on the London underground system started off the decade working for London Transport, under the authority of the GLC. Successive Transport Acts have led to the carving up of London Transport into separate "companies" (buses, underground, catering, cleaning).

Effects of this include:

•leaving workers in one "company" unable to legally support workers in one of the other "companies" in the event of dispute;

•halving the state subsidy (with management promising to get it down even lower, and lose thousands more jobs),

•and the introduction of competitive tendering in areas such as cleaning.

Management has just announced plans for re-organisation which do away with long-standing protective agreements on promotion and staff transfers.

The Kings Cross fire is being used as a cynical excuse to introduce selection by "merit" and "suitability" for jobs which were previously granted on seniority and experience. So far, "suitable" has meant white and male.

Management has told staff in highly responsible and often dangerous jobs not to allow minor ailments and problems to interfere with their duties.

The NUR head office response to all this has been for the most part non-existent. As BR and LUL pile on the attacks, the union gets locked in battle... around the negotiating table and at so-called working parties.

But while the union is talking, BR/LUL simply implement their policies without waiting for union agreement.

The NUR leadership attempts to put the blame for inactivity on the membership. But the opposite is the case.

Recently, workers in the Signals and Telecommunication grades (S&T) voted overwhelmingly for strike action over a pay deal linked to productivity. Instead of calling for an all-out strike, which would have brought BR to its knees within days, three one day strikes and an overtime ban were called.

This divided the workers, some of whom continued to work overtime. At the end of it all, BR got its own way and a number of members left the NUR to join a scab railway union.

Not long ago in a ballot of LUL workers 80% voted for action against management attacks. The outcome was yet another working party on competitive tendering, where management show up for meetings, but do what they want outside.

A new Broad Left is in the process of being formed. Its founding conference will be held in February.

If it is to succeed it has to be an open campaigning body. As the draft charter states:

"We oppose the sectionalisation of NUR membership and seek united action with each group and grade supporting the others... We will campaign in the union to defy Tory legisation..."

The Broad Left Charter also has a policy of *one union in the industry*. At the moment, relations with the drivers' union are extremely bad at leadership level. As the workforce contracts, a membership war has been declared, which can only strengthen both management and the union leaderships at the expense of the membership.

The NUR is extremely male dominated. Women play very little part. But recently, after a number of years of campaigning, a Women's Advisory Committee has been established at national and local level.

There is always a danger in a union like the NUR that these will be incorporated into the bureaucracy and become talking shops. But the women involved, particularly locally, are determined that it will become a campaigning body that will improve the conditions and position of women in the workforce and in the union.



PHOTO: Martine Stead

Rail workers: under attack from government and management alike; scapegoats when anythng goes wrong.

Clapham Junction Train Crash

Some Questions to be Answered!

It's being said that a loose wire which caused signals to flicker is to blame for the Clapham Junction accident.

This may well be true. But as the public enquiry into the crash begins, many railworkers will be asking where the blame should really lie.

In a cynicism based on bitter experience, train-crews know that it is only because the driver of the front train lived to tell the tale that the driver who died is not being made to carry the can.

Instead, it seems that individual Signal and Telecom (S&T) staff will be held responsible.

Responsibility

But responsibility should be placed much higher up. The Public Enquiry must examine more than just the immediate technical reasons for this tragic accident and look into the background of heavy-handed management and government attacks.

The signalling system is meant to be fail-safe, with signals showing red if anything goes wrong. Time and again drivers are disciplined for over-running signals they say were showing green or yellow, but which equipment sitting miles away in panel signalboxes says was red.

Management's faith in the system leads them always to believe the equipment, not the drivers.

Stories

Drivers have reported many similar stories of signals failing. Even simple mistakes such as badly closed panels blowing open in the wind have been known to cause confusion.

At Clapham, despite frantic efforts, trains were still being disrupted two weeks after the accident by faults developing at the site of the crash. The signalling system simply cannot cope with the increase in railway traffic and the lack of investment.

At Clapham Junction signals were being replaced as part of a new system connected with the Channel Tunnel. But with old equipment and longer gaps between routine maintenance, how long before similar problems cause accidents elsewhere?

Government-inspired cost-cutting exercises have reduced maintenance. Staff have been cut back. So it is hardly surprising that standards suffer.

At Clapham S&T staff may have been working over 60 hours per week, seven days a week before the accident. They were told that if they had more than four days sick in a year they would lose the right to overtime.

From our BR correspondent

Add to that the fact that the technicians were having to work in cramped conditions using a torch, with one person covering the normal work of six.

"This is disgraceful," said Jimmy Knapp of the NUR.

"Forcing people to work long hours even when sick under threat of financial penalty is a major scandal — particularly where the safety of the public is involved. The question I want answered is: who is responsible for imposing these pressures on staff?"

To get an answer the Enquiry should also look at the recent S&T dispute, where a successful ballot for action was frittered away by poor leadership, leaving management the upper hand.

Faced with wages significantly lower than for other similar employers such as BT and with low morale many S&T engineers have left BR (*cf.* S&T Technician Officer top rate £178 — £254 for BT equivalent).

Despite clear warnings from rail unions, BR is pressing ahead with further cuts in maintenance and is looking at part-time working, varying the length of the working day, and even more use of hand signalmen in place of S&T engineers covering faults.

It is clear that the final goal is for a fully privatised S&T division.

The faulty signal at Clapham had been installed by a private company. It is possible that a failure of communication between the company and BR staff was a contributory factor. Will the Enquiry look at what privatisation means for safety — both at Clapham itself and across the whole of BR?

Overcrowding obviously increases the numbers at risk. BR's answer is higher fares to discourage travellers from rail travel. Will the Enquiry consider the possibility that a planned and sustained expansion of services might be a better way of cutting down on overcrowding and producing a safer service?

As the two passenger trains collided, a third empty stock train was involved. The Guard from that train, by running forward, was able to stop a *fourth* fully loaded passenger train from becoming involved — it too had passed the faulty signal and came to a stop only 20 yards from the accident.

Plans

But since the introduction of Driver Only Operation (DOO) management plans would have normally meant that empty stock on that line ran without a guard.

In fact NUR members at Waterloo responsible for safety on the line are currently under threat of the sack for taking industrial action (on health and safety grounds) when DOO was introduced.

The guard was only on board because he had to work on the train later. The extra loss of life if a third passenger train had crashed at Clapham is unthinkable.

When the new signals at Clapham are fully installed, management plans to bring in passenger services without guards. Will the Enquiry look into how management policy has left passengers without protection?

Whilst Margaret Thatcher has talked about increased government investment in the railways, railworkers know that their industry has been starved of the finance necessary to provide safe services.

Unless the Public Enquiry looks at how government policy affects safety, it will be failing the millions who rely on railways every day of their lives.

At the Kings Cross Enquiry the government managed to dodge the spotlight. We must ensure they are not allowed to play that trick again.

NHS White Paper:

Begin the fightback now!

The new Tory draft White Paper on the National Health Service, carefully leaked after the New Year break to guage media reaction, represents a major challenge.

By HARRY SLOAN

If the unions and Labour Party do not stir from their usual lethargy on the NHS and build a mass-based campaign of resistance, Thatcher could drive a decisive private enterprise wedge into the NHS before the next Election and effectively destroy it as a comprehensive, national service.

The proposals of Thatcher's secretive cabinet- level "review" of the NHS, would:

•Allow individual hospitals to "opt out" of any local control or accountability;

•Purge Council nominees — the only members to have been elected as representatives — from local Health Authorities;

•Establish a free-for-all "internal market" within the NHS;

•Give GPs the responsibility of buying the cheapest possible treatment for their patients — working to a fixed budget.

In addition, Thatcher insists that tax relief should be given on private medical insurance payments by the elderly.

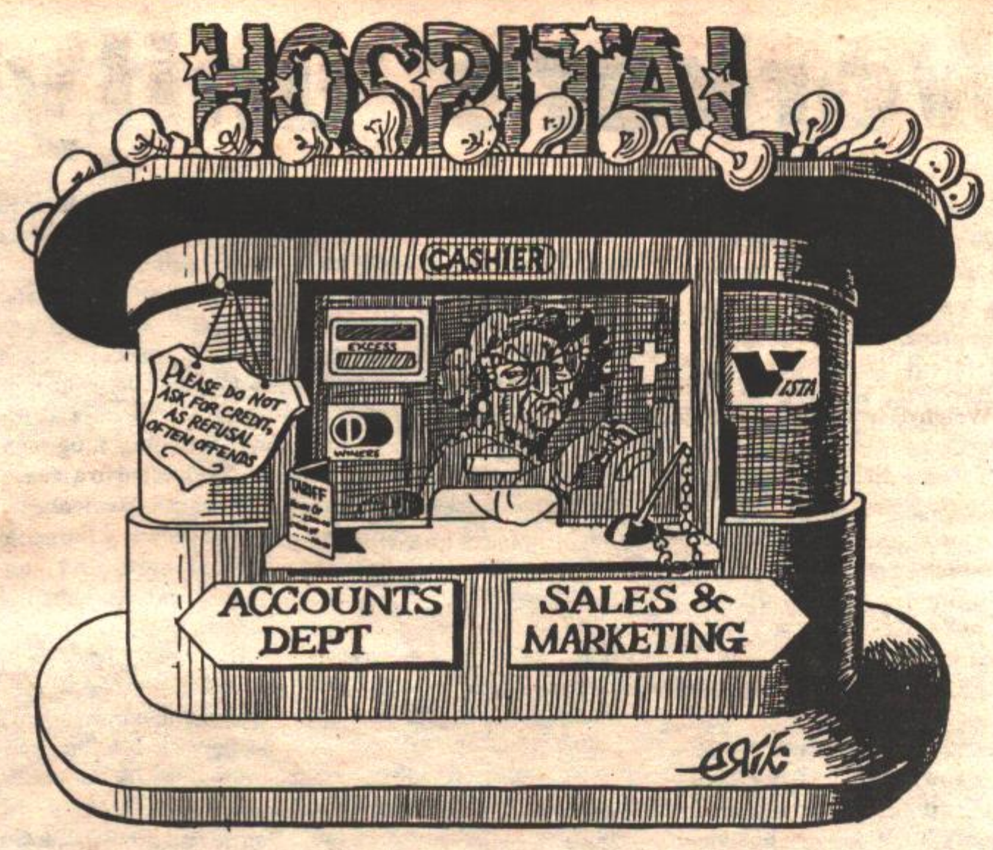
Because of the huge premiums charged to older people, and the exclusion of the chronic sick from private cover, such a move would only benefit the wealthier and healthier elderly — giving them a free handout at huge cost to the taxpayer.

To allow hospitals to "opt out" of Health Authority control is potentially devastating for services, since each "self-governing" hospital, to be run by pre-NHS style boards of trustees, would then be free to decide which — if any — services it would offer to the NHS and to the private sector.

Local patients on waiting lists for routine treatment could easily be passed over or forced to travel miles while their hospitals switch to specialising in hi-tech surgery or divert NHS facilities to money-spinning private work.

Less potentially profitable services, such as care of the elderly and chronic sick, and even accident and emergency services (which the private sector chooses not to provide), are the most likely to be closed down as self-governing hospitals model themselves on BUPA hospitals.

The leaked proposals don't say who would decide whether a hospital should be allowed to opt out, or who would be consulted (though we can be sure it would not be hospital workers or the local community: more likely a deal would be stitched up between top consultants, managers and ministers).



Major hospitals represent vast capital assets built up by the NHS and worth hundreds of millions of pounds: what right has a minister to hand them over to money-grubbing consultants?

The dangers to staff from opting out are equally serious: the proposals talk of new "flexibility" of working (ancillary staff doing nurses' work - for ancillary pay), and locally-negotiated pay scales: in other words, existing Whitley Council conditions would go, and even union recognition could be in jeopardy as top doctors seek profits at any cost.

Also dangerous is the move towards an "internal market" in the NHS, in which hospitals would compete to attract the maximum numbers of patients in their chosen specialities.

There will be no extra resources available overall, so any expansion to compete in one speciality must mean cuts in another.

There is no guarantee that any hospital will seek to provide the less glamourous and less profitable forms of treatment. All treatment will be costed out, as a prelude to further privatisation in a fourth Tory term of office.

The "winner takes all" model of the internal market cuts across any serious attempt to plan or equalise resources and access to treatment.

It runs hand in hand with cutting the only (tenuous) links between local health authorities (most of which are already stuffed full of appointed Tory stooges) and the communities they are supposed to serve.

Booting off the four Council nominees from each district health authority (DHA) will not worry Tory Councils, (whose views are already well represented by hand-picked DHA chairs appointed by Ministers), but will exclude Labour Councils from any say in local health services.

Not one of these policies has popular support: that is why none of them was in Thatcher's last General Election manifesto. The Tories plan to force the whole package through Parliament in the 1989-90 session, well before the next election.

But as the Poll Tax and other measures show, fear of unpopularity will not stop Thatcher.

The only way this attack can be halted is by a massive mobilisation of health workers, trade unionists and the Labour Party, linking with community organisations and patients' groups to fight these plans every inch of the way.

A swift initiative along these lines has already been taken by London Health Emergency, which has called a meeting for its affiliates, the wider trade union and labour movement, Councillors, Community Health Councils and any other interested bodies, to discuss setting up a broad-based united campaign to kill off the White Paper proposals.

The meeting is on Wednesday, February 15th, at 7pm, in Camden Town Hall, Judd St, London WC1.

London Health Emergency will be issuing leaflets and further information before the meeting, and can be contacted at 335, Grays Inn Rd, London WC1 (01-833-3020).

HUDDERSFIELD

Nurses work to grade

By Graham Hellawell
Storthes Hall COHSE member

Unions at the Storthes Hall Hospital will soon be restarting a strict work-to-grade.

Nurses have decided to hold a ballot on taking industrial action if anyone is disciplined for working to grade.

Local management promised to regrade nurses but didn't deliver. At the moment, not one Auxilliary at Storthes Hall, and very few SENs or RHNs, have been upgraded — just enough to cause friction amongst staff!

The mood is positive, but we can't work to grade indefinitely. We should follow the example of nurses in other areas who have already taken strike action.

On November 28th, 1988, a nurse was sent home for refusing to work below or above her grade. Within hours, over 40 nurses walked out in solidarity, joined by the majority of the afternoon shift.

Management had to give in, and allow her to work to grade.

Ford victimisation

Support grows for sacked worker

Forty-two Labour MPs have signed an early day motion in the House of Commons protesting at the victimisation of Ford Dagenham worker and Chair of the TGWU 1/1107 branch Mick Gosling.

By K.C. JONES

They are only the latest to back a campaign for Mick's unconditional reinstatement which was launched when the Assembly Plant Shop Stewards Committee gave their fellow worker unqualified support.

Also on the list of those supporting Mick against his sacking last November on trumped up charges are the Vehicle Building and Automotive Group in Region 1 of the TGWU, the Body Plant Shop Stewards Committee and the TGWU branch at Ford Halewood, Liverpool, and the shop stewards committee of the giant Ford plant in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Management was unable to make any of their initial charges stick so they concocted additional ones.

The first was that ten years ago Mick falsified his initial Ford job application by not disclosing that he had a university degree. The second was his alleged refusal to agree to the company's conditions of employment.

The former charge can hardly be called an offence in anybody's book. The latter is simply untrue. Mick has consistently maintained his willingness to abide by his *original terms of employment.*

The company is now asking him to agree to terms completely different to those for any other Ford UK worker, which would have made him liable to instant dismissal for supporting any industrial action.

Agreeing such a statement would have meant Mick signing away all his trade union and civil rights and setting a precedent endangering the whole of the trade union organisation in Ford UK.

At the time of going to press, Mick has no date for his appeal hearing. This is despite pre-Christmas reports in the London *Evening Standard* which cast fresh light on the relationship between Ford and certain sections of the media, including the *Sun* which claimed that Mick had been at a meeting with Bernadette McAliskey in Ulster when he should have been at work.

The *Standard* claimed that the appeal had been set for Friday, January 6th. When enquiries were made by the union as to why a sacked employee was learning of his appeal date through the mass media, Ford management denied both the story and the date.

This follows Ford's failed attempts to deny Mick's right to serve on a jury by forcing him to attend the appeal when he was on jury service before Christmas.

Management were hoping thereby to leave the reinstatement campaign with the daunting task of maintaining momentum over the long seasonal break. At the moment, Mick remains suspended on basic pay awaiting his appeal hearing.

Union sources said they would be astounded if the appeal did not uphold Mick's sacking. Such a move will trigger strike action in the Dagenham plant.

The view of Mick's fellow workers is clear. His sacking is an attack on the union and Mick's commitment to it. It is now time for the union to stand by him.

Get this resolution through your trade union and Labour Party:

"This branch condemns the victimisation and sacking by the Ford Motor Co. of Mick Gosling, Chair of the TGWU 1/1107 Branch at Dagenham. We believe this is part of a continuing attack on the rights of all trade unionists and is totally unacceptable to our movement.

"We fully support his union's rejection of the special conditions of employment Ford tried to impose on him. These amounted to Mick working with the constant threat of dismissal over his head and effectively denied his rights to free speech and assembly and trade union activity.

"We call for his unconditional reinstatement on appeal and will:

"1. write a letter of protest demanding his reinstatement to John Hougham, Director of Personnel, Ford Motor Company, Eagle Way, Brentwood, Essex CM13 3BW;

"2. send resolutions of support to The Secretary, TGWU 1/1107 Branch, 27 Courtland Grove, Thamesmead, London SE28."

SPANISH GENERAL STRIKE

Workers' unity shakes Gonzalez

The success of the Spanish general strike on December 14th by the country's two largest trade union federations, the socialist-affiliated UGT and the Communist Party's Comisiones Obreras, was assured at midnight the preceding evening.

By Andy Robinson in Barcelona

As pickets gathered in all the major cities, making sure early morning buses and trains didn't leave the stations, TV Espanol news was reassuring the country that the constitutionally-guaranteed essential services would cover 50% of rush hour public transport, over 80% of clinics and hospitals and even 60% of small retailers.

As a programme of news bulletins aimed at keeping viewers fully informed of the following day's events was outlined, the clock struck twelve and the newscaster's voice was sucked into a high-pitched whine.

The TVE technicians had pulled the plug on the government's essential services.

Despite the government's strategy of trying to discredit the once-loyal UGT leadership with comments worthy of Franco's Generals ("UGT's decision to support the strike is a major manoeuvre towrads the Reds," said Gonzalez) and ominous warnings of picket violence, the strike won the support of 80-90% of workers and shopkeepers in the main cities.

In Madrid barricades on the tube lines allowed those drivers who had been press-ganged into maintaining essential services to join the picket line.

Meanwhile, in Barcelona, the Corte Ingles department store (whose Board of Directors included Franco's wife until her long-awaited death last year) was forced to close as shop-workers walked out, having braved the mob of Guardia Civil defending the right to buy Christmas presents.

Public transport came to a complete standstill, as did the chemical and car works in the "*zona franca*". Strike-breakers, especially in the banks, were forced to work behind closed doors plastered with "Closed by National Stoppage" stickers.

By midday, Gonzalez had swallowed his arrogance and admitted that the strike commanded wide support.

In Barcelona 150,000 strong demonstration reinforced the point. The local Council, scared the city's carefully nurtured Olympic image might be tarnished, incorporated the strike into its Christmas decorations by draping a red banner around the enormous inflatable Olympic mascot dog that occupies a central site in the city.

Throughout the revolution, civil war, dictatorship, and the turbulent years after Franco's death, there had never been such a popular strike. The general strike called by Comisiones Obreras in 1985 against the Pensions Law attracted a fraction of the support won by this year's strike.

The crucial difference was the UGT leadership's decision to end the "social contract" that had bound it to wage norms and the government's "rationalizing" economic programme.

This has led to a steady fall in real wages, particularly in the public sector, a burgeoning informal economy, and the highest unemployment figures in Europe.

Inspired by Thatcher's Britain, Gonzalez has decimated employment in the north with his "reconversion" programme for the mines, foundaries and shipyards of Cantabria and the Basque Country.

Taking comfort from the UGT's acceptance of the "reconversion", the "socialist" government went on to establish a 2% wage ceiling, restrict the already limited pension system, and congratulate businessmen on quadrupling profits between 1986 and 1988.

Irritated by the increasing number of impoverished informal economy workers showing up in the unemployment statistics, Gonzalez checked the Thatcher guide again and came up with "*El Plan de Empleo Juvenil*", easily translated as Youth Training Scheme.

Designed to take young people off the unemployment lists and undermine the system of fixed contracts, the Plan offered wages of £120 a month to those under 25 and employers complete exemption from "*seguridad social*" (national insurance) payments.



Spanish workers take to the streets in hundreds of thousands on December 14th, showing Felipe Gonzalez what the movement thinks about his Thatcher-style "austerity" measures.

Contracts were to last a year, after which the employer would have to begin paying wages, taxes, and insurance — or kick out the old PEJer and get a new one from the government.

UGT's leadership had been hardening throughout the year as it noted the gradual slide of its share of the vote in syndical elections and the growth of popularity of the more combative *Comisiones Obreras*. The threat to job security and union recognition implicit in the PEJ finally pushed the two unions into alliance and a joint strike.

CNT, the anarcho-syndicalist union whose heroic past was no comfort when, unlike the UGT and *Comisiones*, it received no compensation after Franco's death, observed tht the most remarkable thing about the strike was that it has not been called two or three years earlier.

Its leadership has also pointed out that, despite the strike's brilliant success, the national one-day action will not be enough in itself.

Negotiations are now to be held between the union leaderships and the government. Gonzalez's insistence that Spanish CBI representatives also attend has been contested.

The Plan de Empleo Juvenil will be withdrawn and revised and the government will have to make some commitment to a more socially-oriented economic strategy. As the NATO issue showed, though, this government finds it as easy to go back on its promises to the working class as to make them. Only solidarity, like that shown on December 14th can force Gonzalez out of his reliance on the Thatcher model.

Sweden

An alternative to the "Alternative"

The following is a reply by members of the Swedish Socialist Party to the article on Sweden in *Briefing* no. 73 by Göran Kärrman.

"Now for the confrontation!" reads the optimistic title of an article on the Swedish General Elections in *Labour Briefing*.

And the conclusion drawn by the author, Göran Kärrman, is clear enough: "Things are rapidly moving towards a confrontation in Sweden."

But this conclusion has nothing to do with Sweden as we know it.

Swedish Social Democracy has indeed been practising rightist austerity politics that would merit confrontation between the government and low wage earners, young people without housing, old people deprived of social services.

This has indeed caused growing discontent among Swedish workers and young people, a discontent manifested in the elections by the 24 year high level of abstention and by the massive vote for the Greens, the first new party to enter parliament in 70 years!

By MARIA SUNDRALL and GÖTE KILDEN

But from passive discontent there are still miles to go before you reach active confrontation.

Kärrman blames our party (Socialist Party, Swedish section of the Fourth International) for failing to "answer in a positive way the development of the Social Democratic left."

But when he proceeds to give examples of this, he mentions two very different phenomena which certainly cannot be reduced to the formula of the "Social Democratic left".

The first is the Alternative Social Democratic slate for parliamentary elections with its base in the small town of Nässjö.

This small group has been active as a local opposition for more than 20 years. They have run alternative local slates for several elections now and have a local strength.

Their activity is mainly centred on municipal questions — social service, taxes, etc. — and on energy questions. On these issues our party has been developing collaboration and exchange of ideas with them for many years.

Having said that, we must note that this year's first attempt on their part to take a national initiative was a failure. After several months of discussions and public meetings it turned out they could only run slates in their traditional home constituency.

Neither can the other phenomenon, mentioned by Kärrman, the so-called Dala rebellion, a broad movement for higher wages launched in the town of Falun in September, 1987.

The meeting launched a campaign for a unified wage demand — 1,000 crowns more per month for everybody — and it was a unique step bringing together radical trade unionists from various trade unions and from various parts of the country in a common activity.

Still, it did not reach the scope expected by many people. Kärrman ascribes this to the manoeuvres of "leftists".

Our party, whose role was essential in the building of the movement in the most broad and non-sectarian way, spreading it from workplace to workplace, from town to town, can certainly not be accused of manoeuvring.

We think that the limitations are due to much more objective and therefore more serious reasons.

Workers are confronted with salarial dictates from both the government and the trade union bureaucracy. Confronted with that "united front" there is still a lack of confidence in their own capacity to fight back and win.

They do not have confidence in active methods of struggle, and they do not have confidence in any political alternative that might express their deep feeling of discontent.

They have no more confidence in the Alternative Social Democrats than in the "extreme left" (for example, our party). Actually, it is striking how few the connections are between the Social Democratic Alternative and the Dala rebellion.

It is totally false to picture, as Kärrman does, the Social Democratic Alternative as the political expression of the Dala rebellion. The truth is that the Dala rebellion for the moment has no political expression.

We think it will be absolutely necessary to create such an expression, to build a new alternative in the workers' movement based on the actual movements among workers, young people, immigrants, etc.

We are also sure that building such an alternative involves splits and regroupments within organised Social Democracy.

But that is not the case today. We cannot by acts of will step up the rhythms. We cannot by wishful thinking bring the confrontations nearer.

What we can do today, and what our party is dedicated to doing, is to prepare the ground for those confrontations sure to come.

Iran

The terror continues

By Jim Thain
Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

Iranian refugees staged a five-day Christmas-week hunger strike in London to protest at the latest massacres of political prisoners in Iranian jails.

The full extent of the atrocities is still unknown, but hundreds of deaths have already been confirmed.

•In Isfahan prison, the Islamic Guard Corps opened fire on 80 hunger strikers.

•In Uromich, at least 200 prisoners were executed by firing squad late last year.

•In Evin prison, hundreds were slaughtered when the authorities detonated a bomb in a hall full of inmates.

•In Amol, political prisoners are being publicly hanged.

The physical elimination of opposition, reminiscent of Stalin, is aimed at terrorising prisoners' families and intimidating their comrades. Simultaneously, there has been a new wave of arrests and an increase in the use of torture.

It is appalling that the British government should be making overtures to the Islamic regime, in the interests of British capital, while Thatcher hypocritically attacks the USSR over its human rights record.

Nicaragua



Don't forget Nicaragua! We print above a further picture of the devastation in Bluefields after the hurricane flattened 90% of the town towards the end of last year.

While capitalist governments concentrate their aid to other affected countries, Nicaragua relies on the international labour movement for help. Contact the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, 23 Bevenden Street, London N1

Colombia

Repression intensifies

By Mike Phipps
Woolwich CLP

The International Labour Organisation and the World Federation of Trade Unions have spoken out against the intense repression being suffered by Colombian workers.

In Colombia, 200 trade unionists have been murdered or have disappeared since 1986 in violence described by ILO as "dreadful".

The WFTU has attacked the detention of more than 1,000 workers and the banning of nine unions in the wake of the recent general strike as "a breach of basic rights, international labour standards and ILO conventions."

The general strike on October 27th 1988 — Colombia's first ever — was 60% successful, despite massive disinformation, media censorship, and a state of siege.

The country was completely militarised, as rural peasants joined urban workers in the nationwide stoppage.

Meanwhile, the Colombia Solidarity Committee is stepping up its campaign for a boycott of Colombian bananas. Twenty thousand plantation workers are forced to work 67 hours a week for starvation wages, and over 700 of them have been killed since 1982.

Of the 40 pence you pay for a pound of bananas in the shops, the workers get only 2p — the rest goes to the plantation owners who finance the death squads.

Boycott Colombian bananas!
Protest against repression in Colombia!

Further details: Colombia Solidarity Committee, Priory House, Kingsgate Place, London NW6 4TA.

Eastern Europe

Gorbachev in Armenia

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's "one world" speech at the United Nations in December struck a chord in millions.

The terrible earthquake which hit Soviet Armenia as he addressed the UN prompted those millions to express their ideals in practical, material form.

Aid and sympathy, both governmental and non-governmental, flooded in from all sides.

A false note was struck however, when Gorbachev sought to use the tragedy to pursue his campaign against the nationalist movement in Armenia.

Speaking in the Armenian capital Yerevan on December 12th he recalled indignantly how "someone asked me if we were going to take up a dialogue with the informal organisations".

Gorbachev considered that such a request could only come from someone "fully devoid of any morals."

The nationalist movement, he claimed, was a safe haven for "political demagogues, adventurists, and corrupted people … who are holding the people in their hands by intimidation."

Despite changes in the political atmosphere over the last few years, strong words from the boss still mean strong-arm measures from the police.

Leaders of the "Nagorno-Karabakh Committee" which had been making efforts to organise earthquake relief have been arrested.

By Colin Meade
Surbiton CLP

Meetings have been dispersed by the security services, while, as Pravda put it, "a hundred kilometres from Yerevan people of various nationalities were saving the lives of Armenians."

As has been the case throughout the crisis in the Caucusus those reviled and attacked in this way have had no opportunity to defend themselves publicaly in the mass media.

For a period before the earthquake no independent journalists had been allowed into Armenia, while news coming out of Azerbaijan is still limited to a few official press statements.

According to detailed accounts from Armenian nationalist sources a pogrom, similar to the one in March in Sumgait where dozens of people died, took place in Kirovobad in late November.

Large numbers of refugees — both Armenian and Azerbaijani — were fleeing their homes just before the earthquake.

Pravda, on December 26th, reported the arrests of Azerbaijani nationalist leaders. It claims they had been holding mass meetings in the capital Baku and exercising influence over Azerbaijani Communist Party officials, a large scale purge of whom is now under way.

This suggests that some Armenian nationalists' claims of an anti-Armenian plot stretching into the highest reaches of teh Azerbaijani establishment are true.

Other reports talk of "pan-Islamic" and "pan-Turkic" slogans and banners on the streets of Baku.

The *Pravda* article denounces both the Armenian and Azerbaijani movements as the work of "anti-perestroika forces" and directs long paragraphs of colourful insults at them.

It fails, however, to provide any coherent account of the course of events or any suggestion of what to do, apart from apply further doses of repression — and ensure that more Azerbaijanis learn Russian (why not Armenian?)

The attempt to identify the Armenian nationalists with corrupt remnants of the Brezhnev era seems particulary unfair given that the nationalists have been protesting for years about the folly of building chemical plants and nuclear power stations in a zone of intense seismic activity.

Furthermore, when the mass protest movement in Yerevan erupted early last year, the demonstrators expressed their support for Gorbachev, convinced that perestroika must also apply to their demands.

The next crisis for Gorbachev will be meeting the enormous cost of reconstruction in Armenia.

Much of the loss of life in the earthquake was due to the poor quality and poor planning of much of Armenia's buildings. Real popular control over the reconstruction would be an essential guarantee against a repeat of the mistakes of the Brezhnev era.

But how can such popular control be exercised when "dialogue with informal organisations" is ruled out and peaceful mass action — whether or not we agree with the demands they put forward — forcibly r[illegible]essed?

LABOUR BRIEFING

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Socialist Conference

Building the Movement Against the Poll Tax

Another step towards a nationally co-ordinated Anti-Poll Tax Campaign was taken on December 10th.

Over 200 delegates met in Newcastle, under the auspices of the Socialist Conference, to discuss how to fight the Poll Tax.

Building on the gathering in Oxford two weeks previously the meeting attracted support from across the country including delegations from Scottish groups already immersed in active opposition to the imposition of the Poll Tax.

A broad programme of action, based on a statement drawn up by the Socialist Conference National Steering Committee, was discussed.

The need for flexible and inventive tactics, within a broad based campaign of active resistance, was a theme which ran throughout and was particularly stressed at a successful *Briefing* lunch time fringe meeting.

By Greg Tucker
Socialist Conference Organising Committee

Amendments were made to the draft programme to delete reference to "Committees of 100" in favour of more stress on non-co-operation by Council workers.

Briefing supporters were narrowly defeated in our argument that Committees of 100 could be used as a mechanism to build for mass non-payment and as part of a much wider campaign of non-implementation and non-co-operation. Too many saw "Committees of 100" as *only* an attempt to dodge the central issues of the campaign.

The meeting rejected the sloganising of some — such as *Workers Power* — who seemed to be demanding the setting up of soviets as a precondition of any campaign, and the minimalism of the ILP who wanted merely to agree to support the call on the TUC.

The final programme called for:

- support for a TUC demonstration in April and a similar event planned in Scotland;
- local actions to coincide with the start of registration in England and Wales and collection in Scotland;
- support for a campaign of non-co-operation by trade unions, non-implementation by Labour Councils, disruption of registration, and refusal to pay.

Whatever doubts some may have of the statement adopted, as a programme of action it represents a healthy continuation of the process started in Oxford. Above all the priority was to bring together all forces opposed to the Poll Tax.

Whilst making no claims to be *the* Anti-Poll Tax Campaign a steering committee was set up to further the work agreed and to forge links with other activists. If the "Oxford" National steering committee can now start to work with those from Newcastle a major step forward will have been taken.

Sheffield NALGO

No Poll Tax (Debate) here!

By Martin Buchwald
Sheffield City NALGO

At a Special General Meeting on December 7th, Sheffield City NALGO rejected a proposal to initiate a process of *discussion* about fighting the Poll Tax, leading to a ballot on action.

In an extraordinary speech, during which he sometimes seemed on the verge of tears, City Treasury Senior Steward Don Turner said that if the Branch accepted the anti-Poll Tax proposal it would amount to sacking the City Treasurer and 100 NALGO members.

The previous day he had addressed two mass meetings in his department. In the presence of the Council Finance Chair, he read carefully chosen extracts from the resolution and vilified its proposers, who were not present.

He then told members to attend the Special General Meeting in order to vote down the proposal. He offered to provide identification for anyone without a union card.

After the vote, Turner and his sidekicks toured the hall encouraging their supporters to leave, so that the meeting became inquorate.

Ironically, a second motion, which would have committed the branch to non-implementation without more ado, might well have been passed in the general confusion, had the Chair not closed the meeting without a formal count.

The *NALGO Against the Poll Tax* campaign now has to try to get action back on the agenda. We will have to work closely with local Anti-Poll Tax unions as well as with other Council unions.

Above all, it is vital that this setback doesn't deter campaigners in the rest of the country.

SCOTLAND AGAINST THE POLL TAX

Committee of 100 AGM

On Saturday December 10th, around 50 signatories to the Non-Payment Statement of the Committees of 100 met in Stirling.

Maria Fyfe MP and John McAllion MP opened the meeting.

Maria Fyfe explained that the Committee of 100 was formed because a legal campaign against the Poll Tax does not go far enough.

John McAllion pointed out that already, according to opinion polls, between 200,000 and 500,000 people in Scotland are unlikely to pay the Poll Tax. He correctly called for a non-sectarian campaign to build on this by April.

The meeting quickly came to agreement that the Committee of 100 should not be seen as an elitist group but should develop local Committees and Committees across trade unions and workplaces.

There are already moves to set up Committees in the EIS (the main Scottish teachers' union).

By Allan Green
Maryhill CLP

George Galloway MP made a call for a Rally and a Scottish demonstration on April 1st. The meeting agreed that there should be a campaign to get Regional Councils to publish the numbers who have not paid at the end of April — to boost the campaign.

However, the discussion around the relationship between the Committee of 100 and the other campaigns against the Poll Tax — especially the SNP and the Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Unions — was not clearly resolved.

There were many suggestions that the Committee should build links with the other non-payment campaigns to unite all those in favour of non-payment in a single campaign. Although a range of important political differences exist, a united front on non-payment would be to the advantage of the struggle against the Poll Tax.

Unfortunately a persistent lobby wanted the Committee publicly to oppose the strategy of asking Councils not to co-operate with the Tax. This was divisive — some signatories are in favour of asking Councils not to implement the Tax.

Non-payment

The argument that the basis of the campaign should be simply non-payment was later accepted on the issue of deferred payment. The meeting clearly came to the view that it should not be calling for three months legal deferred payment by those unwilling or unable not to pay.

Bill Speirs of the STUC made an important contribution saying that the courts do not care if you are an SNP, SWP, or Committee of 100 non-payer, so the Committee should be a one-tactic campaign for non-payment.

By the end of the meeting it was unclear what was the public position of the Committee on non-implementation by Councils. Unfortunately, it now appears unlikely that the Committee of 100, the Federation, and the SNP will unite in a single no-payment campaign.

Overall, the decision by the Committee to try to build as many local non-payment committees as possible is to be welcomed. The positive role played by the Labour MPs involved is a refreshing contrast to the tired old "wait until the next election" approach of the Labour leaders.

There is still an opportunity for the Labour Party to launch a non-payment campaign from the Labour Party (Scotland) Conference in March. In the meantime, however, the work to build strong local and industrial non-payment campaigns needs to be stepped up.

Build for TUC action in the Spring!

Everyone agrees the Poll Tax is not a good thing.

By Greg Tucker
Lambeth Councillor

The Labour Party and Trade unions nationally have even produced some nice looking literature about it.

But faced with Councils preparing to implement the tax, action to stop it has been the last thing the TUC and Labour leaders want to see.

Nevertheless the TUC is committed to calling a lobby/demonstration in March/April to mark the start of payment in Scotland and registration in England and Wales.

But don't be surprised if you haven't heard anything from the TUC about it. They know as well as we do that a national focus is the best way to build a real campaign of active opposition.

This is why both the Oxford and Newcastle Anti-Poll Tax Conferences have prioritised the call on the TUC to organise action in April against the Poll Tax.

We don't just want to see a half-hearted lobby by the committed few. The TUC must now reach out through Trades Councils, local branches and shop stewards committees into every workplace.

But none of this will happen without pressure. Which is why we need resolutions passed in every corner of the labour movement calling on the TUC to act in line with its commitments. And we need real rank and file building of the demonstration in every locality.